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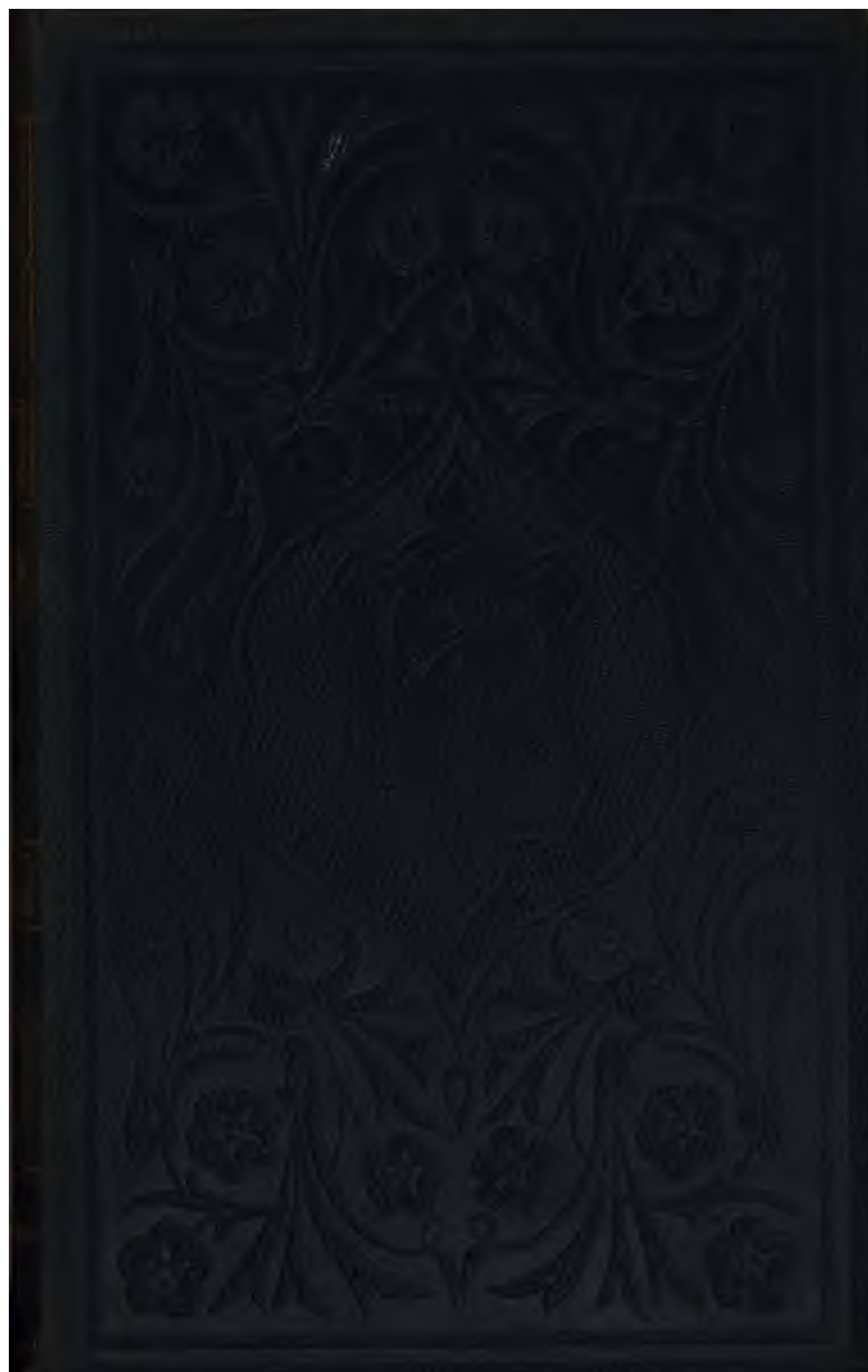
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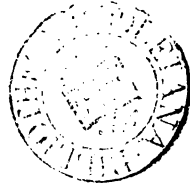


THE
HEIRESS OF HAUGHTON;

OR,
THE MOTHER'S SECRET.

BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"EMILIA WYNDHAM," "TWO OLD MEN'S TALES," &c.

———— As gentle
As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,
Not wagging his sweet head——
CYMBELINE.



IN THREE VOLUMES.
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THE HEIRESS OF HAUGHTON.

CHAPTER I.

——— I know not seems.

'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,

Nor customary suits of solemn black.

But I have that within that passeth show.

HAMLET.

THE carriage stopped at the hall door, after slowly toiling up the little ascent.

But no warm-hearted family greeting was there to rejoice the traveller's heart.

Sir John Faulconer remained quietly in the drawing-room, and his daughters followed his

example. It appeared strangely unnatural to Imogene, who longed to rush out and receive the new comers, but that was, of course, not to be thought of—and indeed, with that disagreeable feeling of awkwardness which arises on such occasions from not being one of the family, and fearing to be *de trop* at such a moment, she kept herself hidden behind the two girls.

But she might have spared herself this annoyance at least, for no emotion did they, either of them, seem to show or feel.

There was a little bustle in the hall. The footman opened the door: there was again a little delay, and the voice of Lady Faulconer, half insisting, half persuading, was heard. At length she entered, in her green silk travelling dress, reluctantly followed by Albert.

“But, ah! how changed! how fallen!”

Reduced almost to a skeleton;—pale as death; all his beauty gone, and clothed in the deepest mourning—a melancholy contrast to the gaily dressed and rather cla-

morous group that gathered around the new arrivals.

Sir John, however, though little used to the melting mood, seemed to feel for his situation. His sisters also appeared good-naturedly desirous to give him a cordial welcome; but their manner too plainly showed how little they entered into his feelings.

Albert took his father's hand in silence.

"Well, Albert, have you not even a kiss for your sisters?"—said Lady Faulconer—"I declare, girls, I had no idea it was so late—no time even to wash one's hands before dinner, and I am so atrociously hungry—Albert! Do you see Miss Aubrey? Dear Imogene! I am delighted to find you here—though that sad boy has not a word for you, any more than for the rest of us."

But Imogene felt it all for him. She saw, by the painful contraction of his pale brow, how intolerable this little scene had been—He looked once or twice wistfully to the

door, as if to escape from what he felt it impossible to endure.

When his mother mentioned Imogene's name, he turned quickly round, looked at her, and a strange gleam of surprise and momentary joy shot over him—but only, like a flash of the stormy lightning, to be succeeded by a deeper gloom.

How she longed to sidle up to him, as she would have done, without hesitation, in old times; to take his hand and whisper a few affectionate words of sympathy and comfort—But he was so changed; that a feeling of shyness oppressed her, and she dare not. He was grown as tall as his father, and had the bearing and appearance of a young man—though still in his face lingered some lineaments of the boy.

His beauty, as I said, was all gone; but to her, there was something far more than beauty in the exchange. The face told a tale of so much grief and suffering; and, yet, all that she had so loved and prized, the manly

strength and spirit, subdued though it was—the truth, and sweetness combined of its expression, were still there.

He did not come up to speak to her, and she still hung back. She felt strangely embarrassed, and there was a certain restraint and awkwardness, as it seemed to her, about them all. So she retreated to a window at the further end of the large drawing-room, and sitting down, tried to distract her thoughts by looking out upon the garden;—but she saw nothing—the melancholy, heart-stricken figure of Albert haunted her. She could with difficulty refrain from tears.

“Are you very, very, tired, Albert?” asked Laura, “have you come a long way to-day?—You look shockingly pale.”

“I wish we might have dinner,” said Lady Faulconer, impatiently; but as she spoke dinner was announced.

“Miss Aubrey!—Where is Imogene?—Oh, slipped out through the window into the flower-garden, I declare—Albert, you go and

fetch her—Come, Sir John, she will excuse us—don't let us wait—Let us play Darby and Joan for once in a way." She took his arm, and they went to the dining-room—she, turning her head back and saying,—“Albert, did you hear me?”—At last he moved reluctantly, as it seemed, towards the window.

“I protest the state that poor dear is in is a perfect despair,” she said, with a tone of mingled impatience and pity—“I can't think what on earth we are to do with him.”

“I never saw a fellow so completely upset,” the father replied, in a tone of vexation—“I thought the lad had had more pluck. Do with him?—send him into a marching regiment, I suppose—I don't know what else we can *do* with him.”

“Oh, I hope it won't be quite such a hopeless affair as that! Time, you know, effects wonders—All will come right in time.”

“Time seems to have made little progress in performing a cure, at present, as far as I can perceive,”—

Was her husband's reply—in the tone of one mortified and out of humour.

Albert, in the meanwhile, most slowly and unwillingly had moved towards the window looking to the garden. There he saw Imogene. She had only gone down the steps, and was now bending over a dwarf tree-rose, covered with bloom, which stood close by. Her face was half buried in a bunch of full-blown roses. She was so afraid of crying, that she had crept out to recover herself.

She turned, and saw Albert standing at the top of the steps.

"Dinner is ready, I believe," he said; "Will you come in?"

He did not attempt to give her the meeting, or to offer his arm. Having delivered his message, he turned into the room again;—There he waited till she had entered and passed him, then followed her into the dining-room without speaking another word.

She was hurt—deeply hurt.

Was all then forgotten?—Now, that he was no longer a child, a boy,—was all their old affectionate friendship to be at an end?—Could he have met an entire stranger with more killing coldness?

They were obliged to sit down side by side, for those two places only were left for them;—but they did so without again speaking to, or looking at, each other; and they exchanged not one word during dinner.

Albert took no part in the general conversation, except in answer to direct questions put to him by his father or mother; who seemed both anxious, if possible, to dissipate his deep despondency.

Their efforts were not, perhaps, very well calculated for the purpose; but, whether well-directed or not, it is certain they completely failed.

Lady Faulconer had, it was plain, hoped something from the presence of Imogene; but that hope was more than disappointed. To her equal vexation and surprise, the two had met, as it appeared, almost as strangers.

Albert seemed scarcely to look at Miss Aubrey—and she seemed shy and distant with him. It is true, one or two glances had passed, which were not quite so unsatisfactory. One especially when, after he had appeared to be painfully struck with his sisters' gay appearance, as they sat opposite, Albert cast a glance at the sober hue of Imogene's dress, and a sweet and tender pleasure just brightened his tell-tale face. However, he turned immediately away again, and seemed resolved not to indulge the feeling.

On Imogene's side, also, Lady Faulconer had, as she thought, detected one or two stolen glances that were satisfactory; to say nothing of a something about her eyes, which seemed as if she were ready to weep every time she looked at him.

The opportunity for observation did not, however, last long; as soon as the dessert was set upon the table, Albert rose and left the room.

"This is very discouraging," remarked Sir

John, as the door closed after his son—"you had given me but a faint idea of the real state of the case—You said he was a good deal depressed; but such a total overset as this I was not in the least prepared for. Where are all the boy's old spirits gone?"

"If you mean his *boyish* spirits—they are gone, I suppose, where all boyish things go—into the land of the has been's," said Lady Faulconer—"At all events, he feels as a boy no longer—you see how he is grown. What a fine young man he promised to be," she added with a sigh.

"It is a most confoundedly unlucky business—Quite done for him. He'll never again be what he has been—or rather what he might have become, that's plain enough."

"Dear Papa," put in Charlotte—who never scrupled to offer her opinion upon all occasions; being, in fact, persuaded that her sense and abilities were many degrees beyond those of either of her parents—"How *can* you be so downhearted about

him? I, for my part, should say, that where there is this sort of parade of grief, it would not last long—It never does.”

Imogene coloured crimson.

“Parade!” she repeated—“Oh, Charlotte!”

Charlotte turned sharply round.

“Yes, parade, I say. Did you ever see such a chief mourner’s face in your life—and that suit of sables . . ! why, he’s only fit to play Hamlet. For my part I never believe, where there is so much outward show that there’s much very deep inward feeling—it gets rid of itself in that way—You’ll see I am right, papa.

“I heartily wish you may prove so,” was her father’s answer.

“One thing I’m sure of,” continued Charlotte, “that if we are all to make long faces, and put the whole house into mourning, and weep over and ah-poor! him from morning to night, he’ll never get better.”

“You know a vast deal about the matter, no doubt,” interrupted Lady Faulconer, “A

young lady of experience extensive as yours doubtless understands the human heart and its ways better than any one else!"

"If one has not had much experience, one may have what is better—observation," was the ready answer, "and so be able to give a pretty shrewd guess about such things;—but I know well enough how it is going to be—we are all to be sacrificed, as usual, to Albert's humour, and cover ourselves with sackcloth and ashes, because he pleases to be inconsolable."

"Silence, Miss Charlotte," said Lady Faulconer, "and remember who you are speaking before."

She had the grace to make no answer to this reprimand, but, a few minutes afterwards, said carelessly:—

"Have you had dessert enough, girls?—shall we go?"—and so rose, and, followed gladly by Laura and unwillingly by Imogene, who longed to stay behind and hear more, left the room.

"I never did see anything like it," she began, as soon as they had got upon the grass-plot; "the thing is vexatious enough of itself—but what's the use of making such a to-do about it?—A creature's not to be miserable for ever, because an unlucky accident has happened;—and even if Albert was to blame—which, I dare say, if the truth were known, he may be—one's not to turn trappist at once. Put a good face upon it; that's the way to make the world soon forget it, say I."

Imogene was too angry to stay with her; she walked on, and sauntered into the more distant parts of the garden. Perhaps she had a secret hope of meeting Albert. She wanted to see him again—she wanted to speak to him, when the rest were not there to ridicule her—she wished to break this cold barrier, which seemed, like some evil enchantment, to separate them—but he was not to be seen.

Poor fellow!—Where was he?

Locked in his own room ;—he was sitting upon a little couch that stood there, with his face buried in his hands—feeling utterly alone in the world. Sunk in that profoundest, deepest solitude, of anguish not communicated—and, worse than that, with the certainty that, if communicated, it would neither be understood nor consoled.

The deep—deep shadow, darker than that of death, was upon his soul.—Separating him, as the grave might have done, from all the warm kindly feelings of living men.—Alone—alone—

Free among the dead, like unto those that go down into the grave.”

Every object around was clothed in the deepest gloom ; not one ray of light broke upon his horizon.

Intense regret for what he had done—yearning cries of the heart after him that was gone for ever—after him who had sprung into the waters and defied death to save his

friend's life,—and whom that friend, by his own rashness and folly, had destroyed.

Now he had at last returned home the melancholy seemed only the deeper. While alone with his mother, he had, it is true, felt that there was little of real sympathy between them, yet she was kind and considerate ;—it was not until the whole family circle was assembled round him that he found the depth of that utter loneliness of heart to which he was condemned.

Then the figure of Imogene rose before him — but he drove it away impatiently. He would not suffer himself even to think of her, and all her loveliness. He was unworthy of her, now. She could not, and would not, and, perhaps, never did care for him. She had not even offered him her hand when he came in! She had gone away immediately, as if the very sight of him was painful. But it mattered not. Never, never should he—shipwrecked, heart-broken wretch as he was—desire her friend-

ship again. It was all over—everything was over. Oh, that he were but dead!

These miserable thoughts were interrupted by the footman knocking at the door.

He rose, and unlocked it.

"Tea is ready, if you please, sir."

"I'm not coming down to tea. Stay—yes—very well."

He went and bathed his eyes and hands, and brushed his hair over his pale face. He had already, in addition to his other sufferings, become tormented with the fear of making a display of his grief before such unsympathising spectators.

The dignity of sorrow made him resolve to conceal his feelings, and endeavour, as much as possible, to appear as usual.

"I am glad you are come down, dear," said his mother, kindly making a place for him beside herself upon the sofa where she was sitting, whilst the eyes of Imogene sadly followed that face and figure, to her the more affecting she had ever beheld in

her life, and rendered still more so by the evident effort to recover composure, if not cheerfulness.

“Have you been out?”

“No, only in my own room.”

“That’s a bad place for him, is it not, Imogene?—Imogene, Miss Aubrey, where are you?” turning round.

“Here, dear madam,” said Imogene, rising from the window at which she was now sitting, and moving a few steps forward, then retreating and resuming her seat again.

A cloud darkened Albert’s eyes.

“Why, you are quite unsociable this evening, my love—What is the matter with you?”

“Am I?” she said simply—but she coloured—“Nothing—I did not mean to be unsociable.”

“Then come and join our party at the tea-table.”

Albert rose to offer his place by his mother. She took it without speaking. He looked wistfully at her for a moment, but

she did not, she could not, raise her eyes to his—and when next she looked, he had turned away, and, drawing a chair to a table at some little distance, had taken up a book and appeared to be reading.

But Lady Faulconer watched him; and she saw that he was not reading; his eyes were not upon the book which lay open before him, though his head was bent down towards it. With a deep piercing gaze they were fixed upon Imogene—despair—passionate admiration were written in them.

Lady Faulconer busied herself with talking to Imogene.—She seemed afraid lest she should even turn her gaze that way; lest she should catch that look.

She began in a very low voice to talk to her of Albert.

“I am afraid you think him very much altered,” she began in what was almost a whisper—

“Yes, indeed—He seems very, very sadly.”

“He has lost all his good looks.”

"Has he?—I didn't observe—He is very, very pale."

"His hair has changed its colour, I verily believe. I never saw such a wreck."

"Has it?—I don't know—He looks so unhappy."

"Poor fellow!—It *was* a shocking thing."

"Oh! it was a dreadful—dreadful thing—I am so sorry for him."

"Yes—you have a kind heart"—and she laid her hand affectionately upon that of Imogene—"You know how to feel for him—You understand him better than his sisters do—you always did."

"Do I?—Oh, I hope he will be less wretched soon."

"That we all most fervently desire—We must all do our best—*You* can do more than any of us."

"I—Oh! no—"

"You used to be such friends."

"Ah! but that was different—He is so altered—He is grown a man—He makes me

afraid of him. He feels, of course, quite differently now.—I am almost a child still. He seems so much older in every way than I am.”

“There you are mistaken—You are more advanced for your age than he is. Indeed, I look upon you as very nearly matched in point of years—so I hope that you will not give him up. See, he has shut his book—I hope he is not going to leave the room—that terrible desire of solitude undoes him.—Albert, my dear, don’t go away—you have not even once spoken to Imogene, I believe, since into the house you came—has he, Imogene?” Giving Imogene a little sign with her elbow, as much as to say—do speak to him.

“I think Mr. Albert Faulconer has forgotten me,” said Imogene.

He turned quickly at the sound of her voice, and a bright gleam shot into his eyes—but at the words “Mr. Albert Faulconer,” uttered in a somewhat constrained voice, he stopped, and saying,

"Nobody forgets Miss Aubrey,"—with a slight inclination of the head—he passed by, and went into the flower-garden.

"He was vexed that you called him, Mr. Albert," said his mother. "Why did you do that, dear?"

"I could not help it—I am sorry—Should I have called him Albert, as I used to do?"

"To be sure you should."

"And did it hurt him that I did not? Oh, I *am* sorry."

"I wish you would go after him, as you used to do in old happy days, and tell him so. That *would* do him good."

"Oh, Lady Faulconer, how can I—Yet why can't I—?"

"Why can't you, indeed?—You used to be friends—such real friends. Well, it is a pity"—added she with a sigh—"but I see there is no remedy." Laura, for goodness' sake give us a little music, for this is really too dismal. Have you any new waltzes?"

And Laura sat down to her pianoforte,

and played a set of brilliant mirth-inspiring waltzes—Enough, as her mother said, “to create a soul under the ribs of Death”—but he, whose soul lay in the shadow worse than that of death, as soon as the sound caught his ear, plunged desperately into the thickets that bordered the garden, and never stopped till he was out of hearing.

And Imogene felt so jarred and irritated by the sound, that it was only by keeping to her embroidery frame, that she could manage to sit quiet.

She had left the sofa, upon which Lady Faulconer had now thrown herself, and, quite tired out, had fallen asleep. Sir John had walked away to take a look at his hunters—Charlotte, buried in a comfortable arm-chair, was reading the last new novel—Laura, never wearied of her pianoforte, continued to amuse herself with one brilliant piece after another.

The moon rose, and the stars one by one came out, and the stilly creeping sound of

the birds was heard in the garden, and the stealthy splash of the fountain contrasted with the brilliant sounds of the pianoforte—and he, the unhappy one, was wandering alone—so utterly alone!—in the dark thickets of the neighbouring wood. Whilst she, bending over her work-frame, thought only of him, and why they could not be as they had always been before—and wondered whether they should ever be again as they once had been.

If he had but known how her thoughts were employed, would his solitude have been so utterly melancholy?

CHAPTER II.

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an idle dream.

* * * *

Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not the goal—
“Dust thou art, to dust returnest,”
Was not spoken of the soul.

LONGFELLOW.

SEVERAL days had passed away much in the same manner: a general dulness seemed to pervade the house. Sir John continued to joke with his daughters, and laugh and show his fine teeth much as usual—for his careless temper was proof against everything; but Lady Faulconer was out of spirits and anxious, and there was a shadow cast over the whole circle.

“It is so tiresome of Albert,” Laura began one morning whilst they were all

sitting at their different occupations in the drawing-room — Laura copying music — Charlotte drawing—Imogene, pensive and silent, stooping over her embroidery frame, at which she had become indefatigable. It was a screen that she was working for her mother — the employment and the interest of getting it done before her mother's birthday she found a great help in the present state of her mind.

“It is so tiresome of Albert,” began Laura, lifting up her head from her employment, and tracing figures with the feather end of her pen upon the paper. “I wonder how long this condition of things is to last. It is almost as if he did it on purpose—What *can* be the use of going moping about in this way—What's done can't be undone—I don't see that it was his fault at all—and if it *was*—there was not much in it.”

“I am sure,” cried Charlotte, “if people were to go watering the earth with tears for every little thoughtless thing they did,

the ground might never be dry—Why, everybody is always doing something or other they had better not—but that's no reason for making oneself miserable, and doing all one can to make everybody else about one miserable—and Albert used to be so different.”

“So different!” repeated Laura, leaning her pretty head upon her hand, and still in meditative mood continuing to trace figures with the feather end of her pen. “He is not like the same creature. Such wild spirits as he used to have—and always ready for any sort of mischief, from quite a little boy. It was such fun—for you know nobody *could* be really angry with Albert then—he had something so nice about him—and besides do what they would, they could not daunt him. Nobody was ever known to make Albert cry by scolding him. If he cried—for he did cry sometimes—it was because people *forgave* him. Was not that droll? But it was soon over, and he as

merry again as ever—but oh! how different is it now.”

“Yes,” said Imogene gravely, “it is very different indeed.”

“Well,” said Charlotte, “it may be rather bad—I don’t say it isn’t—but what’s the use of this everlasting fretting about what’s done?—Will fretting do any good?—and it is so tiresome of him.”

“I wish he wouldn’t be so,” added Laura.

“But he can’t help it”—cried Imogene—“it is impossible he should help it. You talk, Charlotte, as if people could help being in dreadful sorrow—when such a terrible thing has happened—and especially if they had any hand in it. Why, if they have any hearts at all, they must feel it intensely.”

“Oh, nonsense! that’s just the way you excellent people go on talking, till you persuade yourselves that dolorous faces are better than the three cardinal virtues.

Now, do not look so shocked, Imogene—I am sure at first I hardly said a word about it. I put my handkerchief to my eye, and—though I did commit the heinous sin of wearing a pink muslin that day—looked as dismal as possible. But such things can't and oughtn't to last—Why won't he be like everybody else?"

"Because he blames himself, perhaps," said Imogene, in a low voice.

"Blames himself!—That's not very fair of you to say, Imogene, as I told you once before.—Nobody has a right to say *that* of him—*we* none of us do—and papa says it's a scandalous shame to hint at such a thing—and I repeat it, I don't think it very friendly of you, Imogene, to harp upon that string.—All his *true* friends ought and will affirm steadily, that he has had hard measure dealt by the masters; and it's a great breach of friendship not to back him—for if his friends don't support him, one can very well see how it will go.—That's what papa has always said,

—But it's like you, Imogene—so cold!” added Charlotte, passionately.

“Am I cold?—Yes, I must have seemed so,” thought Imogene, “and cruel and unfeeling, I am afraid, too. How warmly Charlotte defends her brother!—That is better than being infected with his sorrow,—better to defend him warmly, than to be downcast as I am,”—thought she, as she sat couched and self-reproaching in silent compunction before this attack.

Charlotte's heat subsided as quickly as it had been excited.

“Don't be vexed, Imogene,” she said, rising from the table, and coming up to her; “I am sure you mean it for the best,—but you see papa hates long faces and fuss,—and besides, he can't bear that Albert should be blamed. He says the best way to make other people believe a story is to believe it oneself. So somehow one has got into a habit of forgetting there was anything of blame mixed up with it,—and above all

things, one cannot bear to hear *you* allude to such a thing,—and it provokes one for Albert. We have all forgotten it, and nobody has breathed one word to him of the sort. Papa was not the least angry after the first flash was over,—but you know papa goes into dreadful passions when he is vexed—which, luckily, he is not often, and it does not last long;—but the vexation is, that Albert seems as if he *would* dwell upon it himself—It looks almost like perverseness.”

“Just when we would give the world that he would take a boat at this regatta on the Trent—where he always used to be,—and papa says he will be missed; and declares, that if he won’t go, he’ll carry us all away upon some excuse or another to a horrible sea-bathing place, that we may be from home—so that Albert’s absence mayn’t be marked—And it is my first regatta—and my first ball—and if he won’t go, papa won’t let any of us go.”

“Somebody’s to be sick and want the

sea. Who is it to be?" cried Charlotte; "will you, Laura?—I'm sure I won't:—But papa laughs, and vows he will give a dose to some one or other of us. We shall keep our bed for a couple of days, if that tiresome boy does not set all to rights."

This sort of conversation, much to Imogene's irritation and disquietude, lasted some time longer. She was sorry, after all, that Laura should be disappointed, but grieved at the feelings she, though in a milder manner than Charlotte, expressed.

Indeed, her patience and good temper, which were proof against most things, were beginning to be exhausted—so at last she threw down her embroidery needle, and walked away by herself.

Slowly and pensively she descended the flights of steps which led from terrace to terrace of the flower-garden, — listlessly gazing upon, yet without seeing, the beautiful flowers with which the borders were filled, till at last she reached the slopes of

green turf which fell towards the little sheet of water now shining in the sun like transparent crystal—and she stood upon the brink some time, watching the various birds that frequented the place, from the little scudding water wagtails, running briskly along the diminutive shore of sand and pebbles; and the water rail delicately tripping it over the broad leaves of the water lilies, to the majestic pair of swans, sailing along in all their majesty, and shaking out their snowy plumage to the sun. The tiny lake was terminated at one end by the noble trees which grew at the entrance of the glen of which I have spoken. The stream that came down it being, indeed, the feeder to this piece of water.

The romantic and beautiful little glen possessed few charms for the family, as I said, and except for the narrow path I have mentioned, and sundry little imperfect ways made through the copse by the neighbouring village boys, bird-nesting or nutting, was

almost impervious. This place was an especial favourite with Imogene. She loved its solitude and its silence; its broken rocks, its varied copse-wood, its pyramids of purple fox-gloves, and all the stilly noises of the woodland solitude.

She loitered by the side of the piece of water until at the entrance of the glen she found herself.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and the sun was shining in the full glare of a cloudless sky. The deep shadowy seclusion of the glen was more than usually attractive, and she wandered on, stopping from time to time to admire the colours of the bright blue veronicas and forget-me-nots, which grew upon the sides of the stream, intermingled with the golden spear-worts; and the deep mystery which the branches of tall trees, forming arches overhead, threw over the scene—now and then interrupted by the rocks, covered with curious, many-coloured lichens, and where various

rare and, to her, unknown plants might be found growing.

She stopped to gather some of the ever-loved and lovely forget-me-nots, of which she had soon quite a nosegay in her hand, collected at the expense of wetted feet and muslins—she kept adding to her treasures from among the beautiful wild flowers that grew round her in abundance; scrambling about after birds and plants till her spirits rose again, and she forgot the disagreeable conversation which had driven her out of doors.

She wandered on and on, further than she had ever ventured before—but the sun shone brightly through the trees, chequering the path with lights and shadows; the birds sang and chirruped cheerfully among the branches—the blue, yellow, and crimson flowers gleamed forth in such gay and rich abundance, and the faces of rock as they broke through the turf, so increased in sublimity as she proceeded—that she could not bear to think of returning.

At length the dingle grew sensibly narrower. The flowers were succeeded by a ranker vegetation. The copsewood grew thicker and closer. The rivulet wandered along, almost hidden by the long grasses which fell like dishevelled hair over it. The change was not pleasing to Imogene, who loved the brighter aspects of nature; but she kept following the track of the rivulet, wondering where it would at last lead to. She must find it out, and then she would go home again. It looked very dreary, to be sure, where she was, but the temptation to proceed was irresistible. So on she went until she arrived at a magnificent projection of rock, which stood out, nearly blocking up the passage.— There was a very narrow path leading round it; along this she crept, steadying herself by her hands against the face of the precipice, until she reached the other side, and then suddenly started back, and almost fell into the stream.

There was nothing but a dreary spectacle before her of dark frowning precipices, rising to the sky, over which the stream had forced its way, and fell, a white flashing waterfall, into a small natural stone basin which it had scooped out for itself below. Upon one side of this, the precipice had somewhat retreated, and was broken into ledges, from which several wildly-picturesque trees shot forth almost horizontally amidst the crags. One in particular, a dark-foliaged oak, springing from a cleft above, cast out its broad branches over the basin, throwing into a shade, almost as deep as night, the small, bare, rocky platform which lay between the receding precipice and the water.

It was a wild, beautiful, and deep solitude. Not a sound but the plashing waterfall broke the silence. Nothing was to be seen but the dark, frowning rocks, the savage, straggling trees, and a small portion of the blue heavens overhead. A dreary feeling of abandonment

and desolation, common to such scenes, pervaded it.

But it was not this spectacle, striking as it was, which had occasioned that sudden start. An object presented itself which had made her tingle with terror in every limb—soon to give place to the most affectionate interest.

In the deep shadow formed by the rocks and over-stretching oak, a human figure lay extended upon its face. So motionless, that her first impression was that it was that of a dead man; but as, shuddering with a natural horror, she kept her staring eye fixed upon it, she heard a sound—there was a slight motion, and a groan.

Such a groan !

A voice of misery so intense, no human heart could mistake it.

She might have been afraid, under other circumstances, to find herself thus alone with an unknown stranger in so solitary a place.

But the voice of intense misery roused every kindly feeling of that good heart of hers, and, without a moment's hesitation, she approached the place.

A few steps more, and she was able to distinguish who it was.

It was Albert.

There he lay, stretched upon the ground, his face buried in his hands, which hands were clutched in his hair, as if he were wrestling with fierce agony; whilst from time to time he uttered such groans as made her very heart break to hear them.

He did not perceive her. He was so absorbed in his misery; it was evident he neither saw nor heard anything.

She stood there, that pretty, delicate young creature, in her white dress, like some fair lily in the midst of this surrounding gloom—like a beam of light from a higher and better world in the night around her.

She remained motionless some little while, watching the convulsive struggles of the

unhappy boy—listening to his deep groans—and her heart ready to die with sorrow and pity.

It was the first time, much as she had seen of suffering in the course of her peculiar life, that she had ever witnessed such agony. Feelings of shyness—which she did not herself understand—had prevented her expressing what she felt; but now, as she stood a witness of this paroxysm, the new feelings of timidity that had lately tormented her were all forgotten; the old simplicity returned; she was again a loving and unconscious child, longing to help and comfort, and only withheld by the doubt whether it was right to disturb him. Her old affectionate simplicity returned—she was a loving child once more, and her only impulse was to endeavour to soothe and to comfort one so very unhappy.

So she stood irresolute and hesitating, afraid yet anxious to speak; when, suddenly, as with a fresh burst of agony, he gnashed

his teeth, flung his arms above his head, cast his eyes in a kind of despairing appeal upwards, he became aware of her presence, and started to his feet.

He looked so strangely, and almost angrily at her, that at first she felt too much frightened to move—but great compassion, like perfect love, casteth out fear.

The anguish written in his countenance was enough. She came nearer; she went up to him; put her kind, still childlike hand into his; looking up into his face with such an expression of innocent tenderness and pity, that his soul softened; he sank down upon the ground by her side, and, laying his face against her dress, burst into a passion of tears.

She let him weep for some time, then she laid a gentle hand upon his shoulder, and sinking upon her knees by him, and bending her face to his, whispered rather than said, "I am so sorry for you."

He lifted up his face at this, and looked

full into those honest loving eyes, which met his—filled with such a simple expression of childlike holy sympathy and sorrow—that his passion of agony subsided, as by a charm.

“Are you sorry for me, indeed?” he asked sadly. “That’s what nobody else is.”

“Oh, so very, very sorry; and so they all are.”

“Are you sorry? Are you, indeed?” he repeated. “I thought you were quite different. I thought you had cast me off, poor wretch that I am! as unworthy of your affection. But are you still the sweet little Imogene?”—looking fondly at her—“that I always thought the dearest and kindest of human beings—and is it possible you could come to seek one so utterly worthless and miserable?”

“But you shouldn’t be so *very* miserable, Albert; you have no reason to be so *very* unhappy. Everybody says so.”

“Yes, I know that’s what everybody

says," he said, with a slight gesture of impatience, as he raised his head, which, as they now sat side by side, he had again buried in his hands. "But, Imogene, if ever you should become such a very wretch as I am—which heaven, in its mercy, forbid—and which you never can be, for you will never have self-reproach to endure. But, oh, Imogene!—if you ever know real misery—then you will understand what sort of comfort is found in being told that you ought not to be unhappy."

And he turned from her again.

"I wish I knew—I wish I knew"—she kept repeating in a faltering voice, "what to say that would do you good—but I am so young and unused to things—yet, dearest Albert, I am so truly grieved;" and again she laid her hand gently upon his shoulder. He once more raised his head and looked up, and beheld that gentle, anxious face fixed on his with eyes brimming with tears—this artless expression of sympathy,

evidently touched and soothed him. The agony had subsided—he said nothing for a little while, but continued to sit by her, absently plucking at the grass by his side. At length he began, with more composure than she had yet seen in him.

“I will tell you what it is, Imogene. They none of them understand me—they never did, and they never will.—They judge of me by themselves—but we are different. I don’t know why we should be—but we *are*: they have no more idea of what I feel than that stone has—Not because they are ill-natured, but because they cannot enter into it—they wonder ‘*I choose to make myself miserable*’—as if misery was a wilful indulgence, and not torture, as it is—As if, having done what I have done—having lost, through my own pride and folly, what I have lost! . . . but you never saw him! Imogene, he was the bravest, cleverest, finest fellow!—and saved my life at the risk of his own—and I threw his away, and he is dead and

I killed him!—and he loved me and I loved him—as I shall never, never, not while I live, love anything again.” Saying this, he once more buried his face with his hands—and wept long and bitterly.

He was, little more than a great boy still.—The child wept the man’s agony.

“But you must not go on crying so sadly,” said Imogene, softly—“Don’t you know that it is wrong—don’t you know, Albert, dear, that we must all be patient, and submit to God.”

“Nobody tells us to be patient when we have done wrong,” said he, sorrowfully—“*There* it lies—*That’s* the sting of it—that’s the sting of it now, and it will remain for ever—I may live and grow up to manhood—I may live to be an old man, perhaps—but if I live a thousand years I shall never forget this—because, Imogene, there is something in being wrong that one never can forget—no, never! never!—For that is hell,” he added, in a hollow voice.

She was a young creature to enter upon the fearful and mysterious subject of sin and death—and she shuddered and trembled to hear him speak as he did—but the clear reason, the bright and sound understanding with which she was gifted, animated by her warm, large heart, seemed never to fail her.

“ But wrong things *are* forgiven, and you know what beautiful things are said in the New Testament about it—about the good shepherd going and looking for the lost sheep ; and, when he had found it, loving it better than all the rest of the fold—because he is so pitying of sinners. And that must be true, for when one is sorry for a person, as I am for you, dear Albert—and so doubly, doubly sorry for you, because you have been wrong as well as unfortunate—one almost loves you better on that account, than one does people that are quite happy and quite right. One understands the blessed Saviour’s loving compassion for

sinner—as I cannot help loving you, Albert—because I am so sorry for you.”

He fixed his eyes upon her, and listened, as if he could have listened for ever.

“The good shepherd!—Yes, that is indeed beautiful.—But is it so?—Is it really there?—I don’t know much what is in that Book. I hear it read at church, but I never read it to myself. None of us do, I believe. It’s not the custom among us at Drystoke. What you tell me would be, indeed, comforting, if one could only believe it—And I think,” he added, cheering up a little, “I almost *can* believe it—because you do not hate me, though you are such a perfect angel yourself—Perfect as you are, you do not hate me — And yet you are not like the others—You don’t try to persuade me that I did nothing wrong—You are so good yourself, that you feel *all* the wrong of it—and yet you love me even because I have been wrong—Oh, that *is* beautiful!”

“I think,” said the young reasoner, “what

I love you for is, because you are so unhappy at having been wrong—and I think I feel, that if I were in your place, I should be as miserable as you are—I believe I can understand all you must feel—but still, I think, that people are not intended to be miserable for ever—and that where they were not very, very wicked—the good God must mean they should find comfort somewhere. He is so good, and his compassions fail not. And so, dear Albert, I cannot help saying, that if instead of lying upon the ground, in this desolate place, giving way to your grief, as you do, you would strive to be patient, and bear it with fortitude — and humble yourself before God, and be soft and good like a little child—you would be comforted.”

Oh ! how—for many and many a year, how, during his life, would the soft persuasive tones of her voice, the gentle words which fell from her lips, and the image of that kind, earnest face bending over

him, recur to his heart—Never, never to be forgotten!

“ Oh, Imogene—How can I ever feel happy again ?”

“ I don’t know about being happy, poor Albert; but I think it is of little use considering about happy or unhappy—If I were you, dearest Albert—I would only think about being *good*. When I am unhappy, it’s my receipt,” she said, with a grave smile, “to try to be doubly good—and indeed it answers.”

“ You are an angel from heaven,” he said, fervently.

“ Oh, don’t speak in that way, Albert—don’t, pray, flatter me—People do *so* flatter me—and I am so ashamed of it.”

“ Well, then, I will not ;—but tell me, darling Imogene, how one sets about being good ?” said Albert, with one of his sweetest and most winning smiles ; “ for I think you could persuade me to anything. Tell me what I ought to do—for, indeed, I am a very distracted and senseless creature.”

"Oh! if I were but a boy," she began, with enthusiasm.

"Well, and if you were a boy—what then?"

He began to be much interested, and his melancholy subsided for the moment. They were sitting side by side, at the edge of the stream, just as in the days of childish confidence; and as he watched her face he thought he had never beheld anything so beautiful.

And yet she was certainly not to be called regularly beautiful—but the charming openness of her countenance, the sweet expression of her affectionate eyes, and innocence-breathing mouth, rendered her far more captivating than the most peerless beauty could have been.

"And if you *were* a boy? . . . But can you wish to be anything but what you are? Can you wish to be a boy, seeing what wretched brutes boys become?"

"All boys are not brutes—you are not a
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brute. Don't shake your head, I am *sure* you are not. Oh! if I were like you, Albert—a boy! such a boy as you are!—wouldn't I strive hard to be a noble man!"

"And can't you be a noble woman as it is?—and is not that as good?"

"I do try—I will try—I wish I may! But a man!—Oh! that's a different thing."

"How a different thing?"

"Oh! I mean he can do so much!—Such a great, great deal more. Oh, Albert! if you were to be excessively learned, and excessively clever, and excessively good—what a world of poor creatures you might prove a friend to!"

"And cannot you? . . . Nay, Imogene, if any one can help a world of poor creatures, who has so much the power as you have?"

"And I mean to do it—I hope to do it," with her face all in a glow—"Mr. Glenroy says I shall—Mr. Glenroy already lets me do a good deal now—but that's not quite all I mean. When I see the immensity that is

to be done—and what a vast, vast number of wrong, and wicked and cruel things go on—Oh ! then I do so wish to be a man !”

“ What would you do if you were !”

“ I’d get into Parliament.”

“ And if you did ? Suppose you could not speak, so as to get the people to listen to you”—said he, affected, and almost amused, and impatient to hear what would come next.

“ That’s it—I’d *make* them listen to me—and that was what I was going to say. If I were a boy, I’d work so hard that I *would* be clever—and I would make them listen to me—and I *would* do some good. Oh, Albert ! so unhappy as you are—poor, poor Albert ! ought you to lie upon the ground giving all up in despair ! Would it not be better to be strong and patient and endeavour to please God—and make yourself clever, that you might do good ? Because you know, dear, when one has been very miserable oneself, as you have been, one knows what it is—

and one can feel for poor, bad people, as no one else can. Oh, Albert! you know what Armidale was before Mr. Glenroy took it in hand—and you can understand what I mean.”

“But I have no Armidale.”

“No,” said she, and laughed—“that’s true—but, foolish boy! Is there no good in the world to be done but in Armidale?”

He felt refreshed and cheered as by gushing waters in the desert. His heart almost smote him for the relief—he felt almost remorseful that he could for a moment be so comforted.

His face darkened again.

“All this is fine talking,” he said, “but the weight I have upon my soul I must carry with me to the grave—I am a lost creature; and shall never be anything but a lost, useless man.”

She turned and looked in his face, so anxiously!

“Oh, don’t—don’t say so!—don’t, don’t

think so. It is almost wicked, Albert. I don't mean that you are wicked. Oh, no! but the thought is wicked—God is so very, very good—and though what has happened is a terrible thing,—yet, dear Albert, you must not—must not despair. Look up to Him—He sits beyond those heavens—Look at His own blue heavens—which are, in their clearness—his likeness. He who made those beautiful skies must be so good—*is* so good. The Viking is gone to Him. He's gone to Him, Albert, and nothing is hopelessly bad in the good Father's world—so don't think and look in that way. You are unhappy—you can't help it—but try for better things—and don't waste the time, and the strength, and the powers the great God has given you, in vainly bewailing over what is past."

"You talk *like* my sisters—and yet how *unlike* my sisters. But would you really have me go to the ball and the regatta, with this broken heart of mine? I tell you,

Imogene, it is impossible to do it. I don't know what would become of me. I do not know what extravagance I might commit. Oh! can you wish it? What a contrast!—What a fearful contrast!" he burst out wildly—"I see nothing but him, as he lay, all bruised and swollen, in his coffin. I tell you, Imogene, he is for ever before me—and to think of a waltz!—gay music and a whirling waltz!—I am certain I should go mad."

"I would not have you be there for the world. I think it would be a very shocking thing, as well as too painful to endure, to be dancing, and a friend so lately dead. I never thought your sisters right—I have told them so. I would never wish you—I should be sorry, indeed, if you *could* do it."

"Ah! sweet girl! then you feel with me in this?"

"*That* I do. Who could help it? No, dear Albert, the time, I hope, will come when you can oblige your sisters and please your

father by being able to appear and go about like other people—though, perhaps, you never will feel *quite* like other people again—but that time has not come yet—and it was not that, indeed, I was thinking about—it was the wasting your life. I was so afraid you would throw your life away. There is a poor wretched man near us—he was a common sort of man—not like you—but he met with a misfortune something resembling yours—though, perhaps, worse—however, he gave himself up to despair, and wanted the energy to resist sorrow—partly, I believe, because he thought his sorrow a meritorious thing. So he grew at last almost into a moping, moonstruck idiot, and so he goes about. He lives near the works, and I see him often when I go down there—mooning up and down—looking so shocking and wretched, and all but foolish—a helpless burden upon the earth. Oh, Albert! It would break my heart to think you could be like that.”

He seemed very much struck with this last speech.

He remained pensive some time, then he suddenly broke out with—

“You are right Imogene—I see the danger of it.”

Her face brightened.

“You do !—Oh ! how candid you are, dear Albert.”

“It is just—I see it—what I might have become—Those people at the house would have driven me into it.”

“Do not let us talk of them, but of you.”

“You care to talk of *me* !”—he said, with a peculiar tenderness of look and tone, that made her heart begin to thrill, and her colour rise, and threatened to call back her shy feelings. “Now Imogene, listen then—I see what you mean, and I know what I will do. I will strive to make *amends*—I have led an idle life at Eton, doing nothing as I ought to do, wasting my time, and throwing the means of education away. It is perhaps

well that I must leave it, deeply as to do so has wounded me. I see now that my duty is to redeem lost time as fast as I can. I will get my father to send me to a private tutor immediately. This will take me away from home—where . . . well, you will not let me talk of it—but where, in short, I cannot just now be happy.

“You want me to work hard—whatever you want me to do I will do. (Now don’t turn your head away.) Because you are a thoroughly sensible girl—though you are the last creature in the world to make a display of it—and what you urge, in spite of the sweet simplicity . . . well, well, I beg your pardon—what was I saying.

“I mean that your advice is good—and I will take it, and you shall see I will *not* throw away my life—I will *not* become a moping moonstruck idiot—I will try to be what you tell me to be—A career is open before me—I am very thankful I have one, and a very plain one. Hundreds of

boys are ruined every year for want of a definite object.

"Yes, sweet Imogene—what you say is true. It shall go hard, but I will *deserve* to be listened to some time or other."

Her head was turned to him again, as with a face glowing with almost rapturous delight, she drank in every word.

As he uttered the last syllables, his eyes, which had been looking forward as if penetrating into a future, full of hope and enterprise, turned to her and caught that look.

He laid his hand on hers.

"But, Imogene," he said, in a softer and lower voice—a voice faltering in its extreme emotion—"I dare not . . . it is too soon—I am not worthy yet—but I will strive to be worthy—Imogene—will you keep that little, little, place in your affection, which I used to hold—which I thought I had justly forfeited—will you keep it open?—And, if I should be—*if* I should ever be—in some degree worthy to fill it—Oh, Imogene! will you restore me to it then?"

Her happiness at these words was such—that she felt as if that one intense joy was enough for a life.

Her eyes fell beneath his—she tried to speak—she could not.

“Not one word, Imogene?” he said anxiously.

She looked up. It was but one glance and one smile.

He asked for nothing more.

He seemed to desire nothing more—he rose from the ground, and she followed his example.

The shadows were lengthening across the valley—the sun was already out of sight. It was full time to return home.

They went down the path together; he leading the way, she following; but neither of them exchanging a syllable.

The brook ran babbling over the pebbles, amidst the garlands of blue veronica, forget-me-nots, and golden spearworts; the soft breeze of evening whispered among the

leaves over their heads ;—the stock dove cooed softly in the brakes ; the little birds chirped and crept among the bushes—all was heavenly, calm, and peace ; but what was the peace around, to that within their hearts ?

What is the sweetest tranquillity of the outer world compared to the peace within—the peace ineffable—that peace which passeth show !

As he opened the little gate that led into the garden for her, he saw the branch of forget-me-nots in her hand.

“ You will give me these, won’t you ? ”

She said not a word, but held them out.

He took them and turned away, going by a side path which led to the back of the house—whilst she went home by the water-side and through the garden, and made her way to her own room ; glad to meet no one, and to find she had half an hour still before dressing time.

CHAPTER III.

So through me did the mystic spirit pass,
Till all my being vibrated with love.

Pygmalion—W. C. BENNETT.

LADY FAULCONER was an interested and scheming, but she was undoubtedly a sensible, woman.

And when Albert, in the course of that very evening, managed to get her to himself by proposing a walk in the shrubbery, he found no difficulty in making her coincide in his wishes and plans.

Every one had been struck with his improved appearance at dinner that day. He was dressed with his old attention, no

longer betraying by that negligence as to appearance, which had so much annoyed his father, what had been the condition of his mind.

Imogene was more silent than usual, and the colour on her cheek a little deeper; but Albert, almost it appeared as if he would prevent this being observed, exerted himself to talk, as he had never once done since his return home.

The two girls had exchanged looks of congratulation;—Lady Faulconer seemed much gratified—and Sir John's spirits had risen to their accustomed pitch. He laughed and joked with his daughters as usual.

"Mother," said Albert—taking her arm in his as they, having descended to one of the lower terraces, began to walk up and down it—"the first thing I wish to do is to ask your pardon for all the additional pain I have given you and my father—and perhaps you will be so kind as to tell him so for me; I feel a little shy about doing it myself."

“ My dearest boy, you more than repay my anxiety by speaking in this manner—and looking like yourself, as you do. So, then, my dear, henceforward we may look upon you as restored to us again. That’s like my own Albert—and this engagement,” after a little hesitation, she went on, “ which your father has set his heart upon your accepting—and which really is a matter of some consequence to your sisters—may I tell him that you will comply with his wishes ?”

“ The regatta ! Oh, mother !”

“ I am sorry to ask you to do it—It was not *my* proposal, Albert—but if you could—”

“ No, mother, I cannot.”

“ Then, what are we to do ? for your father is positive as to not appearing without you.”

“ Let me go away.”

“ I fear that will not satisfy his ideas of propriety at the present juncture.”

“ Mother,” said Albert seriously, but

with a quietness which it was an immense relief to her to observe—"I differ from my father—Even if I could go, I do not think that I ought. But I cannot. People feel things in different ways—I, perhaps, not in the right way—I don't know—but this I *do* know—such an effort as this is impossible—and nothing should persuade me to attempt it."

"I am sorry," she said, "but I will give you the satisfaction of saying—I think you are right."

"Thank you, mother—and now I will go on—I have made up my mind what to do—I wish to proceed with my education, and not to enter a marching regiment, as I think Charlotte told me my father proposed, as the only thing I was fit for."

"I wish Charlotte would learn not to repeat what she hears. Your father only gave utterance to a sort of despairing impatience at your continued depression. It is the last thing he would wish for you, of course."

"Thank you, mother;" and, with renewed cheerfulness, he went on to tell her his desire to make up for time lost, and immediately to be placed with some competent tutor, that he might begin to read hard, in preparation for the university.

He was already entered at Trinity College, Cambridge. This, he said, would be a sufficient reason for his absence at the time of the regatta, and smooth every difficulty at once.

His mother saw all the advantages of the scheme. She believed that close application to study, and the sense of duties performed, would prove the best remedy for a wounded spirit.

"I quite agree with you, and I cannot tell you what a satisfaction it is to me to find you become so reasonable, dearest boy. I had feared your own reflections would be long in bringing you to this. What other influence——"

But that was a confidence he would have

perished rather than have made to any one of his family. All she could get from him was,—

“I am sorry you give me credit for so little sense.”

But she marked his heightened colour as saying, “It is growing cold, had you not better go in, mother? You will settle it with my father—will you be so kind?” He led her up to the house; left her at the steps of the drawing-room window, and she entered alone.

Her first glance was towards Imogene; but Imogene had taken refuge at that embroidery frame which had so often stood her in good stead during this visit. She kept her head bent to her work, and nothing was to be read in her countenance.

“Well, my lady,” began Sir John—as she took her usual seat on the sofa near which he half lay, half sat, reposing in an immense and most comfortable arm-chair, and looking over “Bell’s Life in London”—“have you

made anything out with the knight of the doleful countenance? You have been having a sentimental moonlight stroll together, I find. How goes it? will he give way, or must we be off to heaven knows where?—For my part, I would rather be spared the move, if it might be so.”

“He is—You need not go, dear Imogene,” as she was rising, “I have nothing to tell that you may not hear.” . . . So she sat down to her work again, listening with a beating heart. “Your son, Sir John, is become, I am happy to say, all that either you or I could wish. Albert has an excellent head and a heart of gold. It is only necessary to give him time, and they are certain to come into play.”

“I am heartily glad of it; for I think the tragedy has lasted quite long enough. I began to think he was radically broken up, and would never be good for anything again. I was actually about to write to my friend Sir William Downham to get him a commis-

sion in a marching regiment. Well,—so I am to understand he gives in, and consents to behave like a reasonable being !”

“Not literally in the way you wish about going to this regatta—and I think, my dear Sir John, when you consider all the circumstances, I think you really will allow he is right there.”

“Heigh day, my lady ! *You* deserting to the enemy.”

“Really I feel that it would be not only impossible but improper for him to appear just now at so gay an affair—though I admit the force of the reasons which led you to wish it.”

“Thank you for the admission—and then you go and advocate exactly the opposite measures to those I recommend.”

“Not exactly—Albert himself proposes another plan. I don’t know really how it has come about—but a great change has certainly taken place, and I think you will agree with me that we ought to encourage

it in every way. All that fatal disgust to things, which we deplored, seems to have disappeared suddenly, and in the most unaccountable manner."

"Caprice!—Mere caprice!" muttered Sir John; "I am astonished at your credulity, my lady. Well, go on."

"His wish is now to set hard to work, and make up for the time he owns that he has lost at Eton, boating and cricket-playing."

"And what the deuce would you have had him do better?" cried Sir John, rising from his lounging attitude and sitting bolt upright in his chair—"Would you have had him maundering all day over Greek roots, as if he were going to be a parson?"

"A little Greek does nobody any harm now-a-days . . . Dear Sir John, the times are changing fast — *are* changed. Men cannot make a figure in the world by merely driving four horses and keeping a good table. Everybody drives four—or, rather,

nobody cares to drive more than a pair—and as for keeping a good table, &c., why the very shopkeepers in Fleet Street, and the cotton-spinners at Manchester beat us in that; and, besides, it's almost shocking what educations such people give their children—ours will lose all chance in the race of life if we do not exert ourselves.”

Sir John yawned aloud, and stretched as if he would dislocate his arms.

“To the point,” said he.

“Well, then, Albert has begged me to petition that he may go immediately and read with Mr. Salusbury. Not that he named the man, but that *is* the man—I have just thought of him. Our boy wants to work hard for a year or so, in preparation for Trinity, where he hopes to distinguish himself.”

“*He* distinguish himself! a puppy! Yes, in a six-oar—Mercy on us, what a world we *do* live in!”

“And why should he not distinguish himself? Albert has plenty of ability.”

"Why should he not? Because he's my son and—begging ten thousand pardons, he's your ladyship's son—*bon chien chasse de race*—but I never heard that you, and far less I, were much given to our books."

"But, dear Sir John, it is his own proposal—I did not urge it—and only reflect, pray do!"

"Upon my honour, you are mighty complimentary *this* evening; reflect—*pray do*,"—mimicking—"as if it was such a desperate enterprise to bring me to use reflection, even when the interests of my own son and heir are concerned. Well, my lady, I have reflected then—*pray do*—and more upon this subject than perhaps even you have done, and the result of my reflections is, he shall serve his country in a marching regiment."

Imogene uttered a faint shriek.

Lady Falconer turned quickly round, but instantly resumed her position again.

"I am sure you are not in earnest, now."

"Never more so in my life."

That was not saying much.

"But he has no disposition that way—he wishes to become ultimately, I believe, a Member of Parliament, and serve his country in that rather more distinguished way."

"Hem!—I should not so much object to that, perhaps."

"That is evidently his right vocation, and the proper object for a man of his condition to propose to himself,—and so, dear Sir John, will you authorise me to tell him that you approve of his ideas. He wishes to leave home as soon as arrangements can be made, and to set to work. Nothing will do his spirits so much good. For myself, I rejoice at this change—though I cannot account for it. Some unseen but most powerful influence has been at work,—whatever it may be, it has been of the greatest possible benefit."

Oh, how her heart beat! and how she rejoiced in the shelter of the window-curtain which hung between her and the speakers—

what peace of the spirit—what joy—what sweet hopes and satisfactions were hers !

“ Well—well,” Sir John ended the conference, by saying, as he rose, and, with one or two more energetic yawns and stretches, prepared to quit the room ; “ have it your own way—I don’t know what’s come to the world, it’s growing sadly too wise for me. Who would have thought of *my* son, of all fellows in the universe, turning out a confounded sap.”

“ Something better than that, we will hope,” said Lady Faulconer laughing ; “ a great and successful man—and a thoroughly excellent one too,” she added, as the door closed upon her husband, “ if this unseen influence continues to be exercised over him. I will write to Mr. Salusbury to-night.” And she too rose and went away, leaving all she had said to sink into the young creature’s heart, as she thoroughly believed, and intended that it should do. Imogene remained in a state of felicity such

as none but the pure in heart can really know.

No egotistical feeling—no return upon self, marred the brightness of her joy. She felt that she had saved him. She felt that he would prove himself worthy—justify all she had ever thought of him. She felt proud—melted, exalted at once; and a sweet security in his faithful and strong affection added a joy inexpressible to her other feelings.

The party met again over the tray with biscuits and wine, before parting for the night. Albert, it is true, was not there—he had gone to his own room, telling Laura, whom he chanced to meet, that his head ached, and he should not come down again that evening. He wanted to be alone. His heart was so full—he wanted, in the silence of his own chamber, to brood over what had passed.

His window stood open—he went and sat down by it, and rested his elbow upon the window-sill and his head on his hands, and

gazed into the ineffable beauty of the night—and thought of her—that spirit of peace, truth and goodness, which had come between him and his despair—pointing out the true path, the only path to regeneration and rest. And he did not, like too many I have known, suffer the resolution thus awakened to blaze up suddenly, like some fire of straw, and then sink into ashes. His character was vigorous, his intellects bright and healthy; all he had wanted was a right direction, and he had found it.

He had found far more even than that, for at the end of the vista of a few well-spent years the bright reward was shining.

Yes;—the time would come. Three or four short years, and he would be a grown man—and when he had redeemed so much of his implied pledge and promise as could be done at the university, he would try his chance.

Try his chance—claim the implied pledge and promise upon her side, which his heart,

now bounding with renewed hope, told him had that afternoon been given.

He had put the forget-me-nots she gave him into water. He now rose from the window, took them up, opened a small box of variously inlaid woods, sacred to him, for it had been given him by Hardress, placed the flowers within it, and buried it in the depths of his writing-desk.

And then he returned to his place at the window, to gaze upon the pale and beautiful planet, now rising over the woods; that planet, so suggestive of tender thoughts—and to recall every word, tone and look, of that most blessed day.

And she, sweet thing! was doing much the same. Happy beyond the power of expression, at peace with herself and all the world, and looking forward into life with a thrill of purest, almost divine contentment and hope.

CHAPTER IV.

And my fausse lover stole the rose,
But ah ! he left the thorn with me.

BURNS.

SOME years have now elapsed—during which the usual rapid changes have taken place which time produces upon young people at the age of those with whom we have to do.

Mr. Salusbury had agreed to accept of Albert as a pupil, and my father had secured the same advantage for me. We left Eugene at Eton ; which he was to quit in two years' time, so as to be at Cambridge before Faulconer and I should leave it. He was to

enter as a freshman a term or two before we had completed our stay.

When first I joined Albert at Mr. Salusbury's, he had been there something more than half a year. I had not seen him since we parted at Eton, in a state of intense pain upon both sides. He met me with considerable emotion; but soon recovered himself—and I found, though certainly graver than he used to be, his spirits were restored.

Not the joyous, enchanting gaiety which used so to delight us all—but an equable cheerfulness, which I liked still better. I was astonished too, at the other changes which had taken place in him—he, who had made it almost a principle to study as little as he possibly could without actually disgracing himself, and had given all his best time and attention to active sports, now worked indefatigably with Mr. Salusbury, and with an energy only to be equalled by that he used to display in boating and cricketing.

His success in his new pursuit equalled that we had been accustomed to in his former ones. But this did not surprise me. We had always been in the habit of saying that, in whatever the Celestial attempted, he was certain to excel.

This was all very well at Eton, but Albert had the sense to perceive that it would not do in the world—that, sooner or later, in the great struggle of life, a man counts not for what he might have been, but for what he is.

He had an object which he never lost sight of; and that was to achieve the distinction Imogene had promised, and merit the prize he was resolved sooner or later to claim.

In short, he was indefatigable. Mr. Salusbury was astonished at his perseverance—and remarked that it was seldom that qualities so brilliant as his were united with such a capacity for work. Our friendship was renewed.

I loved Albert dearly, and took a brother's

pride and pleasure in his success ; I will not speak of mine. I was silent and retiring by nature, and if I plodded on at my studies, and succeeded in the end, that was nothing very wonderful. I was born to bear burdens, like the most patient of the animal race, though I sometimes flattered myself, that, like the beast in question, I was not quite so wanting in sharpness, as the world seemed agreed to think me.

As for Imogene, these years were spent by her, as I have reason to believe, in almost unbroken peace.

She was now grown up, and was devoted to the duties belonging to her little empire. Mr. Glenroy often rejoiced over the success of his work.

Under the influences with which he had so carefully surrounded her, she had, indeed, grown up into all that is lovely and excellent in woman.

Gentle, amiable, most loving, and affectionate in her domestic circle, her heart free

from every stain of selfishness, vanity, or pride—with a freshness of character like the sweet air of heaven, which gave to her countenance that cheering expression—that animation and goodness, which engaged the love of every one. She was as gay and busy as a bee. Employed upon the affairs of her government during a great portion of every day; the evening was given to her mother, to Eugene, to Mr. Glenroy, and to the enjoyment of that nature in which she took such excessive delight. Under her gracious influences, every thing that had been planned to increase the virtue and happiness of those belonging to her had flourished, and the change from what she remembered of Armidale was such, as—in spite of the disappointments and obstructions to which every attempt at conferring benefits upon a large scale is exposed—sooner or later, I believe, invariably attends and rewards those who work in faith and persevere.

This success might have been sufficient to

supply that living fountain of joy which played up like sweet springing waters in her heart, gladdening the course of every hour.

But there was something more. True love is the rose of youth—its fairest ornament, its sweetest perfume. Withhold it, and, do what we may, life is but a flat and tasteless thing to the warm young heart. Granted, it is the treasure and joy of existence, in comparison with which all of this world's possessions seem bare and tasteless.

This secret treasure—preciously hoarded, but hidden, buried in the very inmost chamber of that heart of her's—she possessed in its full perfection, and revelled in the secret joy.

It was all unconfessed, for the time had not yet arrived to confide it even to her mother. And her's was not a disposition to desire any other sympathy, or to gossip with a *confidante* over the sacred subject. It was too sacred, too delicate, to be exposed to

human eye but—there it lay to animate and reward every action.

To have done well was to be worthy of him!—and, as far as this world was concerned, that was all she cared for. Not that her love abated in the least for those she had loved all along—her heart was large enough for every affection. Her hidden bliss seemed only to warm and quicken every other sentiment. Her dutiful tenderness to her mother, whose delicate health and spirits required so much kind care, was unremitting; her grateful and affectionate observance for Mr. Glenroy; her gentle docility with Mr. Elmsley; and, above all, her firm unvarying affection and kindness towards Eugene, were the admiration of them all.

Lady Emma suffered herself to enjoy the happiness which this blessed influence diffused around—for her craving anxiety to see justice at last done, was, she believed, upon the way to be satisfied. Eugene was growing up into one of the very handsomest

young men that almost ever was seen. His talents were almost equal to his personal gifts. He seemed endowed with every quality which adorns, or can make its way to a woman's heart. His position set him above the necessity of the strenuous exertion which is necessary to success in life—so that if natural energy were wanting, it mattered not much—He would receive almost a princely fortune with the hand of Imogene ; a fortune that was at the same time justly his own. The time was now approaching when all must soon be revealed ;—and Imogene would learn, that when she bestowed herself upon him, it was not as the giver, but as the restorer, of possessions to which she had no equitable claim. The pride of Eugene, which was excessive, would thus be spared, and that false position which so often mars the happiness of an heiress—arising from the jealousy men feel at being indebted to a wife for their possessions, and which, with a man of Eugene's temper, would have been

more than usually hazardous—happily thus avoided.

Mr. Glenroy, too, had lately begun to regard the good understanding which appeared to exist between the young people with satisfaction. It is certain that he for some time had not been able to look upon Imogene—especially at his first return to Haughton after an absence—without a secret pang.

Family likenesses often fail to strike those who live much with each other,—but they suddenly flash upon us when we meet again as strangers, after a long separation; and it was impossible for him to conceal from himself, upon such occasions, the strong resemblance which it was most distressing to acknowledge. Nothing could have brought him to confess it—but it forced itself upon him, and in thought could not be denied. There was a something of Alice Craven in every feature.

The same might be said of Eugene. He was Edward Aubrey again in the bloom of his early years, only possessing greater

personal beauty, which he had inherited from his lovely eastern mother.

These resemblances would strike Mr. Glenroy. Do what he would, it was not possible to shake off the impression. He could only endeavour to conceal from others the truth of that conviction which was gradually stealing over himself. It was, therefore, a very great satisfaction to him to observe what a good understanding seemed to exist between the young people. And, though he never expressed it, he began to share Lady Emma's wishes upon the subject. He knew nothing of love affairs. How should he ! Perhaps, if he had pretended to judge for himself, he would have said that the terms the young people were upon did not exactly coincide with his ideas of what passion must be ; but women understand these things far the best—Lady Emma was evidently satisfied—and he was glad to content himself with that.

He did not very particularly like Eugene ; indeed, he thought him of a self-engrossed

nature—ambitious and vain ; but there was nothing seriously wrong, and, like most men of his age and character, the external conditions of a marriage were those to which Glenroy attached the greatest importance. This match would set all this perplexity and apprehended wrong, right and straight without injury to any one. He might have preferred young Faulconer for Imogene—but what was a fancy of this kind in comparison with the weighty and substantial reasons, which rendered a marriage with Eugene so much to be desired ?

Imogene certainly grew more and more sincerely interested in Eugene's real welfare as years passed over them. The perfectly sisterly affection which she felt for him, seemed, on his side, to meet much the same return. They were so accustomed to be together, to exchange thoughts and sympathies, that they seemed, in a certain sense, necessary to each other's happiness. Imogene felt flat and dull for some time after

Eugene had left home ; and, upon Eugene's return, he seemed never content unless Imogene was near him.

She exerted her usual beneficial influence over him, though in a less degree than with some others ;—for there was a something of obstinacy and versatility mingled in his character that rendered it one of the most difficult of all to be beneficially guided.

But she was able to sooth his impatient and irritable temper, to soften his susceptible spirit, and to reason him out of some portion of his native jealousy and pride. She made herself a sharer in his various pursuits—ever urging him to make exertions and cultivate his indisputable talents ;—and, in short, watched over and inspired him like his better angel.

Thus time slipped away.

With secret rapture, Imogene heard of

the success of Albert at the university ;— where his indefatigable exertions and his remarkable abilities secured for him every distinction, as the opportunity arose.

The two young people did not meet very frequently during these college years, for Albert spent great part of his vacations abroad, by the express desire of his mother, who was anxious to secure every advantage for him—now that she perceived what he was capable of. She began to anticipate a career of successful ambition as opening before him, which, until this auspicious change, she had not ventured to dream of.

When the two did meet, to every eye but the penetrating one of Lady Faulconer, they appeared, if anything, to be upon rather less intimate terms of friendship than formerly. This was the case. There was not the slightest intention of concealment upon either side. It was purely the effect of that shyness and awkwardness which attend upon conscious love,

natural to their years, and to the honest simplicity and delicacy of their hearts. A little word now and then ;—and, on rare occasions, a walk together at some distance from the rest ;—a quick glance of intelligent sympathy at times exchanged : such were the precious compensations for this reserve. Albert persevered heroically in the course he had laid down for himself—a course dictated by feelings of honourable pride. His heart firmly resolved not to address her openly, until his university career should be finished, and the distinction he hoped to attain had given a certain justification to his pretensions.

The last summer of his stay at Cambridge he spent altogether abroad ; so that they did not once meet. In the meantime, Laura Faulconer had grown up into very great beauty—a beauty so remarkable that the possession of it became quite a leading event in the family annals.

Sir John openly exulted in having one of his daughters a regular beauty, and flattered and spoiled her in every possible way. Lady Faulconer smiled, and quietly made her own plans. Charlotte was inclined to be cross and jealous at first;—but she was too much a girl of the world not soon to discover that this unreasonable indulgence of temper would prove but a losing game—and, besides, that a beauty reflects a certain *éclat* upon her sisters. So she took up the better-calculated part of appearing to take the highest pride in her sister's perfections, and took to flattering and petting Laura like the rest.

Laura stood a very fair chance of being altogether spoiled, but her heart preserved her—for she possessed a heart, and a heart capable of something better than the mere girlish fancies in which she had been indulged. In spite of the untoward circumstances which had surrounded her from

childhood, she was capable of strong and lasting attachments. She loved her family—she loved Albert—she loved Imogene—but her whole soul, poor girl, was given to Eugene.

He had, as usual, not behaved well.

From their childhood, there had been a growing inclination between them, which, perhaps, it may have been perceived, was encouraged by Lady Faulconer, *sub rosa*—though she affected to be perfectly unaware of it. The dazzling beauty, into which Laura suddenly bloomed up, was plainly not without its effect upon Eugene's excitable imagination; and Imogene, who loved Laura, saw with delight signs of increasing attachment, as she thought, which her own heart taught her to understand.

Yet Eugene's conduct was not very intelligible. He seemed attracted by Laura, in spite of himself, and his conduct to her was wavering and uncertain,—now giving way to expressions of admiration, which the poor

young thing could interpret but one way, and yet which, after all, were so vague and undefined, as to commit him to nothing.

This partiality, however, seemed on the increase. The charm of her great beauty appeared to attract him more and more. Every time they met he appeared to be less master of himself, and every meeting but increased the attachment approaching to devotion of the inexperienced and unguarded girl.

Eugene had now been at Cambridge a term or two, and was, in his own opinion and Laura's, quite a man. A man indeed he was become, in external appearance; and if strength of will, indulgence of wayward passions, and, withal, a pretty quick perception of his own interests when his passions did not interfere, constitute a man—he was fully so.

The family from Haughton Hall were now upon a visit at Drystoke,—but Albert was not there. He was at the present time far

away in the Levant, or in Egypt, or possibly at Nineveh. His letters, and most interesting letters they were, came regularly to his mother,—and were by her either read to Imogene when at Drystoke, or Lady Falconer at Haughton ; or else they were forwarded to Lady Emma ; who, completely blinded by her own views and wishes, read them with interest, and handed them over to Imogene. Strange that she never remarked the troubled eagerness with which they were received, or the rising colour and glistening eyes with which they were devoured ! For Imogene was incapable of dissimulation, though shyness, and a certain awe of her mother—the unhappy result of past years spent in so false a position—prevented any approach to that unreserved confidence which otherwise, with her affectionate temper, must have existed between them.

Laura and Eugene played backgammon together in an evening, but they had done

so from children—there was nothing remarkable in *that*. The four young people strolled out to enjoy the moonlight in the garden when tea was over, but they were all there at once,—there was nothing to excite suspicion in that.

Lady Emma, lying netting upon the sofa, did not see—though Lady Faulconer, who stood at the open window, did—that Charlotte had taken Imogene's arm, and that they were walking up and down upon the second terrace; whilst Laura, followed by Eugene, had gone down to the water's edge.

And this was what he was saying:—

“How beautiful the moonlight is reflected upon this motionless mirror! And those dark overhanging trees at the end tipped with silver, and throwing such deep mysterious shadows over the grass! Do you know, Laura, at moments like these I feel as if the world was no longer the same place that it is in the ordinary daytime?

‘The pale round moon looked coldly down;’—

Oh! not coldly, Byron—calmly!—softly!
—not coldly; Laura, is it?”

“I don’t know why the moonlight is so beautiful, and has such an effect upon one,” she said. “There is no colour; it is not so lovely as a fine sunset; yet there is something in it—I don’t know.”

“You feel it!” he said, warmly; “you feel it as I do—you feel everything as I do—just as I do—you are the only girl in the world that understands me—Imogene is too clever for my taste.”

She smiled—She looked so lovely when she smiled!

“Yet, Imogene is so gentle,” she said, “one forgets she is clever.”

“Yes, she *is* a dear good girl—I did not mean to say a word against her—I would not for the universe—but so merry. She *is* like the daylight—so open, so free, so good-natured, so sisterly—and sometimes so *advising*—and I hate to be advised—but she does it for the best. Why do *you* never

advise me, by the by—Because you know I hate it ?”

She coloured a little and answered—

“Because you know I can’t. It would be a strange thing for me to set about advising one so clever as you are, Eugene.”

“But if you took interest in me—the interest,” and he lowered his voice, “that I sometimes think—flatter myself...pooh, nonsense !...when all the time I know you don’t care for me the least atom in the world—do you, now ?”

And he looked up half playfully, half beseechingly into her eyes.

She coloured more deeply—did not speak, but turned those sweetly beautiful eyes upon him, and caught his—so full of meaning ! A meaning it was impossible for her not to understand.

“No, I see you don’t the least in the world,” he said, with a little laugh, and turned away. “I am the most unlucky dog

in the universe, I know...as your eyes are without question...well, I will not say what *they* are—you might be affronted, perhaps. Truth—unvarnished truth—is never acceptable, eh? But to return to the old subject—why *do* you never advise me? Simply because you do not think me worth advising. Imogene has a greater value for me. She's always teaching and indoctrinating."

"Oh, but Imogene is so sensible, and I am so stupid."

"You look so stupid. Oh, yes! certainly, you *are* very stupid. One feels it so stupid to be with you. One never comes near you if one can possibly help it, you know. But *do* advise me—I would rather be advised by some people's stupidity than by all the ability possessed by others."

Her heart began to beat fast. It would beat in this way when he made these sort of speeches. What would come next? Something definite—something serious—some-

thing to assure her of that affection which she had reason to hope was all her own, and yet that it would be such a comfort to feel certainly assured of. But it was the same now as ever. Nothing more satisfactory than these vague insinuating words—implying so much, and engaging for so little—was to be obtained.

They walked in silence by the side of the water. He appeared to be in deep thought—saying no more, only stooping down every now and then to pick up a pebble and fling it into the lake. At last she turned towards the steps that led to the upper terraces and to the house.

“Are you going in? It is so sweet here.”

“It is time—that is the servants’ supper-bell.”

“I did not hear it—but you are glad of an excuse to go away, I know. You were listening for it—hoping to get released—but you ought not to make ceremony with me,

surely. There is no reason why you should stay, because I love this moonlight, and this water, and those nightingales, a thousand times more when you are by. Yes, yes—I see you are impatient; let us go in, then.”

She felt that she ought to go—and yet she longed to stay. He looked as if he wanted to say more. She hesitated; but when he saw she hesitated, he seemed to recollect himself, and saying—

“*Allons donc*—if so it must be,” led the way to the house, which they entered together.

She came in, disappointed as usual; consoling her heart by repeating to herself that, young as he was, it was not likely he would say anything just yet. She was unreasonable to expect more than he did say.

She sat down by Imogene, near the window; and he went and took a book at a table near, and pretended to read, but kept looking over his book, and thinking how far more beautiful Laura was than Imogene—

and wishing that Laura was Imogene, or that Imogene were more like Laura.

Such a soft, dependent, unaffected creature!—whilst Imogene had received quite a boy's education. Not that she was masculine or forward in the least—but she was so perfect. What a tiresome thing perfection in a woman was!—would weary one to death in the long run. It would be a perfect slavery—and yet—

Well, he was too young, thank goodness, to think seriously about such things; time enough this five years hence—or when any one seemed intending to run away with either of the two.

CHAPTER V.

And shall I see his face again?
And shall I hear him speak?
I'm downright dizzy wi' the thought—
In troth, I'm like to greet.

SCOTCH BALLAD.

ANOTHER year has passed.

Albert has taken his degree with the highest distinction—he has been abroad again—and still without returning home.

He has been at Paris and at Rome, but now he is come back—and, at last, they will meet once more.

Lord Ulick was now living at a country house which he had hired about midway between Haughton Hall and Drystoke. At the neighbouring market town an assem-

bly — which is an affair of considerable importance in such places—was going to be held, and Lady Ulick was named among the lady patronesses.

The neighbourhood round the Hazles, the name of Lord Ulick's place, was what is commonly called a good one. There were many families with young people in them near; and the balls had acquired a species of celebrity which ensured a good attendance, and which all the neighbourhood made a point of exerting themselves to maintain. It was a matter of course that the stewards and lady patroness for the night should assemble large parties at their respective houses upon the occasion.

Lady Ulick was proud of her office, and most anxious to do herself credit, by bringing a large and brilliant party with her. She had no difficulty in bespeaking the people from Drystoke. Laura was to make her first appearance at this place, in all the splendour of her beauty; and, to Lady

Ulick's extreme delight, Albert had written from London, that, though particularly busy at that moment, he would break every engagement rather than not accept her invitation, and should most certainly be there—though he doubted whether he should be able to reach the Hazles to dinner. They must not wait for him—if delayed, he would certainly join them in the ball-room.

There was more difficulty with Lady Emma. She had grown nervous, in consequence of indulging so long in retirement—she felt quite unequal to the exertion. In fact, she was now little fitted to make one in a ball-room—the state of mind in which she had for so many years existed—the alternations of feeling, the hopes and the fears, which agitated her by turns, had seriously impaired her health and spirits; but Lady Ulick, not contented with writing, drove over on purpose to plead her cause herself.

She had set her heart upon having

Imogene, the great star of the county, to adorn her party.

“Now do, dear Emma, indulge me this once ; if you cannot and will not come yourself—which I am excessively sorry for—let Imogene and Eugene come. I am quite an old married woman now, and you might trust her to me ; but if you don’t like that, there is Lady Faulconer—you have entrusted Imogene to my sister’s care hundreds of times before this.”

“Not in public—Imogene has never appeared in public.”

“Why, one can hardly call this appearing in public. When one has lived at Bath, you know, and seen the rooms, one scarcely calls it being in public to go to a ball in a little place like N——, though they have, I own, built a very fair ball-room, and you know it’s an excellent neighbourhood ; and then I’m lady patroness—and not to have Imogene!—Miss Aubrey!—Lord Ulick’s own niece—it would

seem almost an affront to the neighbourhood."

Lady Emma still seemed to hesitate.

"You need not be afraid to trust her," persisted Lady Ulick, laughing, "for I've got nobody, I am sorry to say, likely to run away with her. I'm rather short of young men—only Eugene, Mr. Lenham, and the two Templetons, and Jack Harris—you know him, a queer fellow, but he makes fun—he's a crony of Lord Ulick's—and perhaps Albert, who is more like Imogene's brother than anything else—they've known each other so long...at least, he has promised faithfully. He will scarce be able to come to us at dinner, but he engages to join us at the rooms."

Imogene, who was standing by, a not uninterested listener to what was passing, for she had a great desire to go to this ball, felt her colour change at this last speech. She looked—she could not help it—imploringly at her mother.

"See!" cried Lady Ulick—"she wants to go—don't you, Imogene? She wants to go. Come, Lady Emma, do not be cruel."

"Do you really wish to go, child?" said her mother, turning to her; and, struck with something she did not quite understand in the expression of her countenance, she went on—"Do you really care so much about it? I thought you were of my mind—and did not like assemblies."

"Not at all likely that she should be of your mind. I'll be bound you liked assemblies well enough when you were her age—and such a beauty as you must have been then," added Lady Ulick, with something of her accustomed want of breeding.

Lady Emma sighed—she recollected but too well one ball, at least, that was never to be forgotten.

"Does Eugene intend to go?"

"Oh, certainly! I have bespoken him—not the least difficulty with him—but it will be a grievous disappointment, I am sure, to

him, among the rest, if Imogene is not there. He made quite sure of that—and of dancing the first dances with her, I believe.”

This last was a little species of embroidery in which Lady Ulick, when she had a point to carry, seldom scrupled to indulge. Everyone knew, by a sort of instinct, when a point was to be carried with Lady Emma, whose name to conjure by.

The conjuration had not lost its power.

“I am sure, my love,” Lady Emma said, and now turning to her daughter, “if you really wish to go, I should be sorry to prevent you; and though I cannot—indeed I cannot—bring myself to appear on one of these public occasions, yet, certainly, with your aunt Ulick and Lady Faulconer, there can be no real objection to your going without me. Would you like it?”

“Like it!—oh, mamma!”—and she stooped down, and, as in the times of little Moggie, kissed her mother’s hand.

“Why, what a little rake you are become

all of a sudden," said Lady Emma, playfully.

"Thank you!—thank you!" cried Lady Ulick—"I could kiss your hand myself. This is really very nice of you—and when will she come?"

"She will drive over with her maid, who is a very respectable personage, being no other than her quondam nurse," said Lady Emma—"but I think I cannot spare her before the very day."

She did not, indeed, wish to encourage the habit of much intimacy with Lady Ulick—whom she could not greatly either like or approve.

"Thank you!—thank you!—that will do quite well. Our party are not to assemble till that day."

And enchanted with having gained her point, Lady Ulick took her departure, leaving Imogene quite in a flutter of delight.

It was more than a year since she had seen him—and now they were to meet,

and at a ball! A ball! The most public, yet the most private, of all occasions. He would dance with her—she was sure of that—and they should sit down together, and talk as much as ever they liked; and everybody would be too busy themselves to observe them—and it would be still better than being absolutely alone.

Oh! how happy she should be.

And then she began to think of her dress, and to wish, silly girl! for the first time in her life, that she were as beautiful as Laura, and to feel anxious about her appearance, and almost inclined to be down-hearted about herself, as true lovers are apt to be.

And then she felt so thankful that Laura was Albert's sister, and so there could be no rivalry between them. In spite of that, however, she wanted to look her *very* best. She wanted him when they met again to think her improved since they had last parted. She knew *he* thought her nice looking then, but she wanted him to think her more so now. And

then she laughed at herself, and if she had not been so happy might have been inclined to quarrel with herself for being so foolish. But oh ! how she wished the Faulconer girls had been at hand to advise with. Laura had so much taste in dress, and Charlotte knew so well what was best in such sort of things.

“ Well, my dear, you seem in a deep study,” said her mother ; “ what is that little head of yours so intently revolving ? ”

Imogene laughed.

“ Oh, mamma, you will think me too silly. I was anxious about my dress for this ball—one wishes to look nice, you know.”

“ To be sure one does,” said her mother, much pleased. “ What do you mean to wear ? I always prefer white—yet you look very pretty in pale blue. Suppose we consult Eugene.”

“ I am afraid he would hardly condescend to give an opinion, mamma ; but, if he would,

I should be so glad. His taste is excellent in everything."

Lady Emma smiled.

So entirely destitute of advisers as she was, Eugene's opinion seemed to Imogene very well worth having.

"Well, dear, I will undertake to get an opinion from him before to-night's post goes out, for you ought to lose no time in writing to Madame D——.

"Yes, dear girl," she went on, more than usual affection beaming in her eyes,—and yet she had for a long time found it impossible not to love Imogene exceedingly,—
"yes, dear girl, we must have you look your best upon this your first appearance in public, or what would Mr. Glenroy say?"

Eugene pronounced in favour of white and silver—gold and silver trimmings being then the mode, and Madame D—— received her orders accordingly; and Eugene also insisted upon the common plan of roses for

the hair—but Imogene was too happy not to think him quite in the right.

Lady Emma observed with delight that he seemed almost as much interested in the subject as herself. He was in high spirits, and full of anticipations of enjoyment. He, who was usually so careless and indifferent about things, that it was impossible to tell whether he was pleased or not, was now all excitement and good humour.

The sympathy of their feelings seemed to produce more cordiality than ever between them. They laughed and chattered, and were the very best friends in the world.

“You will dance with Imogene the two first dances,” Lady Emma ventured to say, when Imogene had left the room.

“Why, do you think I might? Coming from the same house, I thought we ought not, perhaps.”

“I don’t think that is a reason, dear Eugene; and I wish you—I wish it—upon

her first appearance in public I should like you to be her first partner."

He looked suddenly up—a flush overspread his face—he caught Lady Emma's eye, and dropped his.

"Of course I should like it—be most proud of it," he said.

"Then engage her at once—I am certain it will please her."

And so it did.

She would rather dance with Eugene than with any in the world—save one; and she particularly wished not to dance the first dances with him.

And now see her, with heightened colour, and most happy face, standing by, whilst nurse opens the interesting box from Madame D——, and first takes out a most lovely head-dress of pale pink roses, that seemed almost shedding their leaves, so

lightly and delicately were they put together—and, then, a dress, so pretty, bright, and elegant.

Nurse was in raptures, and Imogene was smiling with pleasure.

“Let us take it down, and show it to mamma,” she said.

Eugene was sitting with Lady Emma.

Imogene blushed, and would have retreated; she felt ashamed and afraid that he would laugh at her vanity.

“What’s that? Come in,” cried Lady Emma.

“It’s Miss Aubrey’s ball dress,” answered nurse, with importance.

“Oh, let us see it, by all means,” said Eugene.

And so nurse entered, displaying the beautiful and distinguished dress to the best advantage—and Eugene looked at it with a strange interest. Imogene was gratified—she had not imagined that he could care so much about anything that only concerned

herself. But Lady Emma understood what was passing in his mind—she saw plainly that he was beginning to feel proud of the distinction which his near connexion with this lovely creature would throw upon him.

She felt more assured than ever that all was as it should be. He examined the dress and the flowers with attention, and expressed his approbation in high terms.

“You will beat Laura Faulconer, out and out, Imogene. They can’t afford such things as these, and one never gets the *quite* right thing in *economical* ways,” he added, somewhat contemptuously, “such as exemplary housewives like Lady Faulconer think it right to practise.”

Imogene looked vexed.

“I wish you had not said that, Eugene. It takes the pleasure out of my pretty dress.”

He laughed.

“Well, I really believe you,” he said, with something of more real tenderness than she had ever heard him express

before ;—but she thought only of a brother's affection, and was pleased with it. “ I really believe you would rather *not*—rather *not* eclipse other girls—for you have less vanity and more real good nature, I will say, than any girl I ever saw in my life, Imogene.”

I think I must complete the history of that particular day by taking you, by way of contrast, to Armidale.

You must follow me into a house standing a little apart. It had not the neat appearance which most of the habitations in the district presented, since the judicious plans of Mr. Glenroy had been carried fully out through the cheerful, persevering self-devotion of the young Imogene, assisted by Mr. Elmsley.

Her heart was, indeed, in the work—and it was a true woman's heart, made

up of love, pity, and enthusiasm—as *Lamartine* has it.

I have been afraid to weary you with a repetition of the same tale, however lovely. Descriptions of persevering goodness, as of complete happiness, are apt to pall upon the reader. But I must indulge myself in describing what passed upon the evening of this day—the one when the ball dress of white and silver, and the head-dress of pale blush roses, had created an almost childish delight in that girlish heart.

The house, then, which we are about to visit, stands apart from the rest—in a solitary nook of the hills, about half-a-mile from *Armidale*—and, unlike the generality of others in that place, is still dirty, wretched, and dilapidated.

There has been a rude attempt made to crop the little garden that surrounds it,—but half of this small portion is abandoned to unsightly weeds; the thistle,

and the nettle, and the colt's-foot, have taken full possession of what had been once productive of much comfort. The hedge has been broken down in several places, and the materials carried away for fire-lighting wood—a species of petty depredation, be it said, by the way, once so common, but now altogether unknown at Armidale. The portion of the garden still under cultivation showed only a few stubbs of stunted, ill-planted Scotch kale—some straggling, half-grown potatoes—and a few wretched remnants of French beans. The little path that led from the broken gate was strewn with leaves and rubbish,—it evidently had not been swept for many days.

You enter the cottage by what had been once a rather handsome door, but of which the hasp has been recently broken, and find yourself in the large common room, or house place, as it is called in that county. What a scene of dirt and beggary presents itself! The fire is almost out, a few whited ashes

are all that remain in the grate, before which two sickly, miserable, half-clothed children are grovelling in the dust and dirt. They are amusing themselves with tormenting a large beetle that they have caught out of doors. Everything around has the air of habitual negligence and disorder. The straw-seated chairs are in holes; the plates and dishes—some huddled unwashed in heaps, others ranged carelessly upon the once handsome shelves and dresser are cracked, chipped, and half in pieces. The corner cupboard stands wide open—but no bright display of well-cleaned glass, and, the pride of such little domiciles, a few silver tea-spoons, are to be seen. A few broken tumblers, with the remains of “drink” still visible, a bottle, marked “cordial waters”—which smells strongly of gin—a tattered, broken-backed Bible—two torn volumes of a pedlar’s edition of the English translation of the “Juif Errant,” and a few dirty tracts, lie upon the lower shelf.

The table, which looks as if it had not been washed for years, is stained all over with marks of dirty dishes, and the rings left by liquor glasses. But there are symptoms even worse than these. The signs of recent strife are visible in a more than ordinary confusion in this wretched abode of vice and misery. Chairs have been thrown down and broken—the great fire-shovel lies in the middle of the floor—and upon the edge of it is a fearful stain.

Imogene entered this region of darkness like some angel of light,—her fair hair could scarcely be confined in her white simple cottage bonnet, but shone almost like sunbeams round the pure oval of her serene and touching countenance. She was dressed in a plain white muslin, with a black silk scarf just folded over it. Mr. Elmsley—the grave, the quiet, the unwearied in good, the wise, the excellent Mr. Elmsley—followed her.

She turned round and exchanged piteous

looks with Mr. Elmsley, as she entered, and the miserable prospect met her eye.

He sighed and said,

"I fear it is an utterly hopeless case."

"Don't say so—pray don't say so—what will become of them if *you* give her up, dear Mr. Elmsley?"—she answered sadly. "Poor wretched creature! I wonder where she is. Little ones, where is your mother?"

"Mother's up-stairs," said the eldest—"she's very bad, and she's gone to bed—father's been a-beating her."

"And where's your father?"

"I don't know—gone to work, I reckon."

"Shall we go up-stairs, and see what's the matter?" said Imogene.

"You had better let *me*.—No, no, you are right—you will do more good than I can—Yes, my dear, lead the way, and I will follow."

She climbed the stairs with some difficulty, they were so slippery with grease and dirt; and entered the room above.

The apartment was of a good size and tolerable height, and had a casement window large enough to make it bright and cheerful; but it was perfectly deformed with dirt and neglect, and the light and air of heaven were almost completely excluded. The latch of the casement was grown over with cobwebs; it seemed as if it had not been opened for months; piles of all sorts of squalid rubbish, rags, broken bits of furniture, dirty tattered books, were piled up upon the window-seat, so as almost altogether to exclude the light; the walls had once been neatly papered, but the paper had been torn down in many places, and hung in deplorable remnants, displaying the brown and smoke-dried walls behind. The four-post bed had, in days gone by, been a comfortable and handsome piece of furniture, but the tester was now broken down, as if by some act of violence, and hung (a wretched memento of past misrule) over the wretched creature there lying upon a filthy mattress,

covered with a tattered sheet and most offensive-looking rug.

Her head, resting upon an uncased pillow, was bound up in a checked red handkerchief, under which her face appeared dreadfully swelled. She panted, and seemed to breathe with much difficulty.

"What has been the matter?" The clear, gentle tones sounded like a voice from heaven in that scene of degradation and sin.

The woman raised her head a little, and with evident pain.

"Be you, indeed, come again," she said. "Be you not yet a-weary of us—Oh! but you *are* an angel of mercy."

"I would be never weary of coming to you—if it would do you any good," said Imogene, gravely but gently; "but I am afraid almost to come—I do not know whether it is right to come—It seems only to harden you in evil—and may be a bad example for others."

The woman began to cry.

"Don't say so—don't say that, Miss Aubrey. Harden! the only time this heart of mine, which is more like a stone than a heart of flesh—the only time it ever *softens*—is when you come—Heaven's own angel of goodness as you are."

"Don't talk in that way," Imogene interrupted her by saying, with some severity.

"I won't—I won't. But the heart *will* feel, and the tongue *will* speak."

Imogene: But what's the matter? You look very badly, and all in such dreadful confusion below.—Margaret, what have you been doing?

The Woman: Doing—it's all on *his* doing—that brute's doing. He's been like a rampant mad bull a-tearing and raging about the house, and, at last, what does he do but seize hold of the fire-shovel, and takes me a blow on the back. It's a wonder he didn't kill me at once—a brute as he is.

Mr. Elmsley: Margaret—is there no fault

on your side?—lay your hand upon your heart and tell me truly. Speak truth, woman, if you can do nothing else. What had you been doing?—Where have you been this morning?

The Woman: Never out of the house. Not once out of the house—as I hope for mercy.

Mr. Elmsley: And what had you been doing in the house? Not cleaning it—not making it as it ought to be, a fit place to receive a decent man into.

The Woman: Why, I did what I could—but I was so low—it seemed as if I had no strength in my limbs to move. I was a-forced to sit a bit by the fire, and so he found me.

Mr. Elmsley: Low! And what means that bottle in the open corner cupboard? How much of that bottle had you swallowed yesterday? It was that made you *low*, as you call it, and incapable of anything but hanging about like a nervous good-for-nothing slat-

tern—and then, instead of shaking off the languor which was the effect of your own sin, and trying to make amends by forcing yourself to a little exertion, what did you do?—Don't try to hide it—I know it as well as if I had been present. You took glass after glass of the “cordial waters” to revive you—in plain words, you made yourself drunk with gin.

Imogene: Oh, Margaret!

Mr. Elmsley: And so your husband found you stupidly drunk when he came home for his dinner. His rage and violence sobered you. Yes, you are sober enough now. But who's to blame—What is a drunken wife to expect—What does she deserve?

Imogene (with an expression of the deepest grief and pity upon her face): Oh, Margaret! who could ever think you would deserve such a speech as that? Oh, Margaret!

But the conscience-stricken woman was silent.

Mr. Elmsley went on:—“You will say

your husband drove you to this—that he was fond of the alehouse—and that you were lonely and discontented—and began with only a little drop, just to keep your heart up—but if you did not actually drive your husband to the alehouse, who *kept* him there? He was a gay, thoughtless young man, I know, when you married him. I warned you, Margaret; you know I did, when you were keeping company. I told you that you must prepare, if have him you *would*, for a good deal of difficulty with him. He loved company and talk, and what he calls a cheerful glass—and such company as he loved is not exactly, perhaps, to be got at Armidale now-a-days—so he went elsewhere for it. But what did you do? Did you do your best?—First you cried, and then you scolded; and, when nothing of that sort would do—fool! and worse than fool!—you persuaded yourself, that you who starved at home, had as good a right to a comforting drop as he had—a comforting

drop, alas !—and you went and bought cordial waters. You knew what you were doing, and that they were nothing but disguised spirits, and as such forbidden things here ; but they were in small compass, and you managed to hide your sin from your neighbours, and from us all, for some time. But you grew paler and thinner, and more and more negligent and careless, till you became the wretched sloven that you are now—and your husband, who *has* a great deal of "good in him, in the main, and who would have reformed, and wished to reform, was driven to despair, and almost into madness, by your courses. Margaret, I do not mean—God forbid that I should!—to justify your husband. Intemperance in a man is a dreadful sin—but a drunken woman !—oh ! she is a very fiend !

Imogene (stooping down towards the woman, whose tears are by this time flowing fast) : But, Margaret, you hear what Mr. Elmsley says. You are sorry—say you *are* sorry, —humble yourself, Margaret, and say so—

and pray God to put better thoughts into your heart. Don't be a fiend,—don't be that horrid, horrid thing, a drunken woman. You, who used to be blithe, and bright, and gay as a bird, when you lived in our nursery, Margaret."

The Woman : My head ! my head !

Imogene : Let me look at your head.

The Woman : Oh, Miss Imogene, it's not fit for you to see—It will make you sick to look upon it.

Imogene : No, I am not very easily made sick. Oh, mercy ! what a place it is !

Mr. Elmsley : It ought to be washed and properly dressed, but there is not even a drop of warm water to be had.

Imogene : Oh, stay a moment, I'll soon blow up the fire and warm some.

And down she went, and gathered together some coals—for of coals everyone had abundance at Armidale. No improvidence could exhaust the means of obtaining firing, and she made the children blow up the fire,

while she put the old broken tin kettle on. She was soon up stairs again with a bowl of warm water in her hand, and she found an old rag somewhere about, and with it she cleaned the wound, which appeared much less terrible when washed; and then she laid her own cambric handkerchief soaked in water upon it, and bound it up, and smoothed the pillow, and straightened the bed; the woman looking up to her all the time with an expression of gratitude, almost of adoration.

“That will do,” said Mr. Elmsley, “we will leave you now, Margaret, for you had better keep yourself quiet.”

Imogene: And I will get old Betty Travers to come and straighten the house, for it is quite a shame to be seen; and wash and tidy the children, and set tea against your husband comes home.

The Woman (crying fast): I’m feared as how he never will come home again! He thinks he’s killed me! Oh, poor lad! poor

lad !—I've ruined him ! I've ruined him !—He's gone for a soldier !—He has often threatened he would—why didn't I heed him ! Oh, William ! William ! I shall never see thee again.

Imogene : Oh, I hope not so !—Do you know which way he went ?—Mr. Elmsley, shall we go and look for him ?—I am sure you will persuade him to come back when he knows his wife is so sorry. You *are* sorry, are you not, Margaret ?—You'll make a better wife to him in future, and he'll make a better husband to you, please God. In His great mercy, all is not lost yet.

With a heavy, sorrowful heart, Imogene left the cottage.

“ One almost despairs ”—she said—“ so often that she has promised better things—will she ever be reformed ? ”

Mr. Elmsley shook his head.

“ A drunken woman is rarely reformed. ”

Imogene sighed deeply—“ I cannot have managed well—I might, perhaps, have

found her out sooner if I had taken the right way. Oh how different it is!—I thought, by this time, there would not have been one drunken brawl in Armidale—and this woman, and only two years ago! What a bright, merry creature she was—she was like a bird on the bough.”

And so talking, they entered Armidale ;—and Imogene cheered up as she passed on. It was now evening, and a fine evening—and doors were open, and women were sitting outside at their needles, and men were resting upon the benches, or standing in knots, cheerfully talking to each other—and children, clean, fresh, and rosy, were running, and shouting, and gamboling about—all was wholesome enjoyment of the hour.

And as she passed along—that fair young creature, bright as the day-beam from on high—the people rose, and saluted, and blessed her. So young, and yet so wise and good!—Even to look upon her was to make men feel happier and better.

Some houses she entered and visited, as she passed by, cheering the aged, and consoling the sick and sorrowful. Wherever she came, peace entered with her, and a blessing followed her ; but it was vainly she inquired upon all sides for William. William was not to be found—he never appeared in Armidale again—he was one more added to the victims of intemperance. But I am not going to proceed with this story. I only wish to paint Imogene as she was at that period of her life. Faithfully intent upon discharging her duty. Throbbing, as her heart was, with its own peculiar emotions—nothing could make her forget her charge.

There was much business to be done—for the next morning she was to leave home for Lord Ulick's. She found it extremely difficult to give her attention to what she was about, for her thoughts were most perversely wandering ; but she was not to be thus conquered—and, before she returned

home, everything that ought to be was effected.

She was quite tired out before she threw herself into the little pony chaise, and Mr. Elmsley drove her home.

But she came in feeling so happy! Such a bright face it was as she ran up to her mother's dressing-room, and sat down and made tea, and related all that had passed—and her mother listened with more interest than usual, and seemed to take pleasure and to sympathise in the goings on of Armidale in a manner that was a new delight to Imogene. Eugene, on the contrary, displayed, if possible, more than his usual indifference to the subject. Stretched at his full length upon a sofa, he was engaged in reading a volume of Lord Byron's poems. He hated this kind of business, and, moreover, invariably seemed jealous and a little out of humour whenever the subject of Imogene's exertions and plans, as regarded Armidale, was brought up. She was sorry—yet it was but a light

trouble after all. People, she thought, were naturally so different. Eugene seemed as if he could not take interest in such things—but there was another. Oh! how unlike!

He knew well how to share in every feeling—all would be as it should with him. Already, she had heard it whispered, that young as he was, he had been invited to take the place of private secretary to an eminent statesman. This would open to him that wide career of usefulness by which she knew he would profit. Her heart exulted at the thought. But this exultation was a secret known to that heart alone—no one intermeddled with this joy.

Lady Emma listened to the report with apparent indifference, merely saying that she was glad Lady Faulconer should have so much reason for satisfaction in her son, and dropped the subject.

Eugene yawned when he heard of it—and remarked that it was a fine thing for those who liked it to be political slaves—and that

Albert was just made for it; he was quite spoiled, and was become a regular sap. Well, it was all as it should be. Let every man follow his own taste—he could not say this would have been his.

There was, as usual, a little temper, a little jealousy, a good deal of envy, in that speech—feelings which Imogene was grieved to observe; but even this was only a momentary vexation—she was far too well pleased herself to care much what Eugene thought upon the subject.

CHAPTER VI.

Silence is the perfectest herald of joy :

I were but little happy if I could say how much.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

It was a pleasant cheerful party that was assembled at the Hazles.

I was there among the rest. It was now two years since I had been in this part of the country, and since I had seen Imogene.

I had been abroad with Albert,—traveling with him during nearly twelve months, and in company with the son of the statesman I have alluded to, it being in consequence of the communication thus opened, that this able and distinguished man had become

acquainted with Albert's merits, and had offered him the place of private secretary.

He was young for such an appointment, but the nobleman in question possessed, among other gifts, that most valuable one in business, a clear discernment into the qualifications of men for the various offices of life, and no one better knew the right man to select for the right place. And, certainly, Albert's character, manners, and disposition, his fine talents, the habits of persevering exertion which he had acquired—added to his chivalric sense of truth and honour—fitted him admirably to discharge the important functions of the office.

The appointment had only just been made public, infinitely to the satisfaction of both his parents. Sir John chuckled and laughed, and indulged his joking propensities to a greater latitude than ever. His daughters looked higher, and thought better of themselves for what they considered a great advancement to the family, and their

high spirits responded to their father's mirth.

Lady Faulconer was more quiet in the expression of her satisfaction, but it was far deeper than that of the rest. She loved her son. He might be said, except a little fondness for Laura, to be the only one of her family that inspired anything that deserved the name of love; for she was of too scheming, worldly, and calculating a nature, to be capable of much affection.

The great and secret object of her life, so carefully concealed, so long and with unremitting perseverance pursued—in spite of every discouragement — she now beheld within her grasp.

To see Albert master of Haughton Hall, and invested with the power, and occupying the place, which the possession of that already great and rapidly increasing fortune would confer—had not been so much the secret desire of her heart, as the secret determination of her will—a will, one of the strongest

I ever met with in man or woman—and what will not a determined will effect?

Circumstances more favourable than she could have possibly anticipated, had aided her beyond hope in the pursuit of her object. The very disasters of Eton, which presented at first such an unfavourable aspect, had proved in her favour.

It was not difficult for her to find out—experienced and penetrating into character as she was—from whence that influence had proceeded which had worked such a beneficial change in Albert. Nor was it hard to decipher, in the serene expression of Imogene's happy face—a something which in her most joyous moments had never been seen before. No less, by every tone and look of Albert, when the two addressed each other, did she feel assured that they understood each other, and rested, in all the confiding faith of their ingenuous years and tempers, upon their mutual constancy.

It had been Lady Faulconer's anxious care

that nothing of all this should transpire—she wished, as far as possible, even to keep it a secret at present from the parties themselves. She knew Lady Emma's plans and wishes ; and it was, in her opinion, most important to the ultimate success of her project—that not a suspicion of the truth should get air until the young people were a few years older, and had attained the right to claim the liberty to choose for themselves, and strength and resolution sufficient to adhere to their choice.

She, therefore, had not only encouraged Albert's desire to spend much time in travelling, but had suggested and forwarded such plans in every way—so that, during the whole of the last few years of his education, he had only been occasionally at home—just long enough to give him the opportunities for maintaining his interest with Imogene, and so short as entirely to blind Lady Emma's eyes. If a transient apprehension had, at any time, flashed across her mind—and her

security seemed so complete that even this may be doubted—it was instantly repressed by the recollection of the openly expressed wishes of Lady Faulconer, to keep her son abroad during the greater part of every vacation, and the indifference she showed to the furthering of his intimacy at Haughton.

And now, most unexpectedly, to crown the ambitious mother's plans with success, came this most honourable and gratifying appointment, at once lifting Albert into a sphere which, added to his father's estate and social position, entitled him to make pretensions to the hand of any heiress in England.

Lady Faulconer was now as impatient to bring them together, as she had been before watchful in keeping them asunder. Eugene had grown to manhood, and might prove a formidable rival. At present, it is true, he seemed careless and indifferent as to making himself an interest with Imogene, and in fact was more than half in love with her own

beautiful Laura ; yet she understood him as well as she did the rest, and she felt assured that at any moment the worldly ambition which was an integral part of his character might, as he advanced in worldly knowledge, spring to life, and the young man become fully aware of the value of those things which were thrown in his way.

It was curious to sit aside, as I was at that moment doing, ensconced in a nook formed by the elbow of a bookcase—half buried in one of those quaint arm-chairs with a reading-desk fixed to the arm of it, which used to be common in old houses—watching what went on.

Imogene and Eugene were announced.

She came in, looking so happy—so bright and sweet!—and as for Eugene, he was really become extremely handsome. He was not very tall, but the symmetry of his figure was perfect. His sweet, expressive, grey eye, was formed to transmit every feeling of that vehement and wayward temper—the beautiful

outline and proportion of his features—set off by his abundant hair, of no definite colour—as Lamartine tells us of one who resembled him in this—which seemed ready to assume the hue of every varying feeling as it arose, sometimes glistening like the golden locks of Phœbus; at others hanging in heavy masses over his sullen darkened brow, like heaps of clouds above a scowling horizon.

It was impossible to deny that his appearance was both interesting and striking.

His temper was variable as the changes of an April sky. However, to-day it was all sunshine, and he followed Imogene, looking as well content as she did.

Lady Ulick was not in the room; Lady Faulconer and her daughters came forward to meet them. Colours more lovely than those of the opening rose spreading over the fair face of Laura; whilst those beaming eyes of her's were bent to the earth as she held out the loveliest of hands towards Eugene. He took it, but, as I thought, with a certain negli-

gence. Yet he whispered something in her ear which deepened the colour on her cheek, as, with a little laugh, she turned away.

Lady Faulconer loaded Imogene with the most affectionate caresses. I saw the young girl's eyes glance round the room, but he whom she sought was not there.

"He will be here to-night," the mother answered to the unexpressed thought,—and then she led her to the sofa, and kept holding her hand lovingly, as she thus proceeded—
"You know, my love, we must expect to have less of him now than ever." At which Imogene's countenance fell a little. Not an expression of that treacherous face was lost upon Lady Faulconer; her own complacency was evidently much increased by what she read there, as she thus went on—"You must not be sorry—you are his friend, I know—his true, sincere, and most valued friend. We must not be sorry—it is so high a distinction—an advantage scarcely to be appreciated at his early age. He starts at once,

and most advantageously, in the career—I — I say *we*, all his best friends — have coveted for him. I am gratified more than I can express—and I may proudly declare that it is the recompense of his own energy and talents.”

Oh! pretty it was to see the enthusiastic spirit kindling in the young listener’s face, as Lady Faulconer thus spoke.

Then a shade of anxiety came over it, and she just muttered, half in a whisper—

“Then, perhaps, he will not be able to come down this evening at all.”

Lady Faulconer repressed a smile.

“Oh, yes, he will come—I am sure he will do the impossible; but he will come to this ball, dearest Imogene. No power on earth, I am convinced, sweetest Imogene, could keep him away: not links of iron could bind him. It is not improbable that he may still be in time for dinner.”

Before we separated to dress, Imogene had found me out, and I had received a cordial welcome, yet with a shade of shyness, which reminded me—" *Que je n'étais pas la rose, mais que j'avais vécu auprès d'elle.*"

We all assembled in the drawing-room, except the three young ladies, who had not yet appeared, and were chatting, for the quarter of an hour before dinner, in a rather distant window. Albert had not arrived. Sir John and Lord Ulick, and other gentlemen of Sir John's standing, were discussing the last day's run, where Lord Ulick, seaman as he was, had distinguished himself by his fearless riding. There was a pleasant, cheerful hum of conversation to be heard, in which I, as usual, did not take much part, being engaged in my old favourite occupation of observing. Eugene did not say much more than I did; he kept leaning against the side of the window, his eyes fixed upon the door.

It opened at last, and the three young

ladies entered. Charlotte came in first, according to the precedence due to her rank—a precedence she always took care to claim, but more especially when Imogene was present. Imogene and Laura followed, arm in arm.

There might be a difficulty in deciding which looked the most charmingly, though Laura was, unquestionably, the most regularly handsome. She was dressed too, to-day—as if in contradiction of Eugene's remarks—without any of that regard to œconomy with which he had reproached Lady Faulconer. She wore a dress of tender pink, and as evidently the handiwork of a first-rate artist as that of Imogene's herself could be, though somewhat less rich and expensive in its materials.

Lady Faulconer understood the tactics of society far too well to make a vain attempt to contend, in matters of expense, with the wealthy heiress of Haughton ; but the prize for superior taste and elegance lay open to

her. The making Laura's appearance upon this day most peculiarly attractive and distinguished, was as important a feature in the carrying out of her plans as any other upon that eventful evening.

There was a sort of start of admiration among the young men grouped at the window—a start of mingled surprise and pleasure at the entrance of these two sweet young creatures—and a general rush forward to greet—or I might say, without exaggeration, almost to do homage to them.

Eugene alone kept his place—watching the two with what seemed rather a critical than the adoring eye, such as at that moment I thought they deserved. He seemed to be instituting a sort of comparison between the two. His eye turned from one to the other: it finally rested upon Imogene.

She was acknowledging, with an air of unaffected sweetness and modesty, the salutations and compliments of the more elderly and important personages of the party—that

is, of the heads of families, and their lady wives—being received by all with a respect and distinction which plainly showed the high place that the heiress of Haughton was considered to hold in the county. Her possessions, indeed, were so large, that all distinctions, but those of very elevated rank, sank into insignificance before them. She had been accustomed from her infancy, through the judicious interference of Mr. Glenroy, to be treated as became her position, and she now received the attention of all around with that simplicity, the result of habit. There was neither shyness nor stiffness about her, far less the slightest approach to assumption or ill-bred condescension. Her grace and gentleness won every heart.

And as this went on, Eugene's eyes, I observed, became rivetted upon her, watching her with fixed attention. I know not whether I read his feelings aright, but it appeared to me that he was, like the rest,

filled with admiration, and a certain astonishment at himself that he had not understood all this before.. I thought I had reason, also, to remark the existence of a new feeling of satisfaction, which, when he reflected upon the place he seemed called upon to occupy in relation to the heiress, was gradually succeeding to his ancient captiousness and jealousy. He smiled with pleasure at the recollection that he was engaged to her for the first dance.

I saw Laura, from a seat on a sofa, which she had taken, and where a chair close by stood unoccupied, casting many a wistful glance towards the window—but he never once turned his eyes her way. I saw hers follow the direction of his, and the ruby of her lip turn pale.

I had no patience with him. I am a good-natured, soft-hearted fool—always must be putting in where I fancy people are uncomfortable.

I went and sat down in the chair left un-

occupied—I wanted to find something to say that would cheer her.

“How lovely that head-dress of yours is,” I began—“It is the most becoming thing in the world. What do you call these flowers? Forget-me-nots?”

I was rewarded for my good intentions by a look of impatience, as if she thought me the greatest bore in the world to occupy that place—for just then Eugene began to move.

I rose instantly, but it was too late. He passed on to the group round Imogene. I could only hope Laura believed it was owing to my own ill-management in occupying the chair just at that moment, and not to his indifference that it was not taken by him. Be that as it may, she looked more cross than sorry just then.

I was *bête* enough to rejoice she could indulge in her self-deception.

When we were called to dinner, I took care to be a little out of the way.

Lady Ulick committed Laura to Eugene, but his face slightly contracted, as a face does when a qualm of disgust passes over a man.

Did he begin to suspect a scheme in this? Was that the reason?

I was ordered to take out Imogene.

She laid her hand in her pleasant, confiding way, upon my arm—as if I had been an old uncle of seventy; saying gaily, as she did so—“Oh, I *am* so glad!”—and began to chat, before we had even reached the dining-room. She was in the gayest spirits—I had never seen her in gayer. She was infinitely charming. Her hidden love, it was, as is mostly the case with every honest heart, which gave the zest to all the distinctions she had been receiving. She prized this general expression of good opinion for Albert’s sake. She hoarded it for Albert, and, I believe,

she was not sorry that Albert's friend was present to witness it.

We were favourably placed at dinner.

Between her and the lady who sat in the seat of honour by Lord Ulick, there was a jolly country gentleman, whose talk was of "runts," or rather of game, and especially foxes; and the trio were soon in high discussion upon those never-ending subjects. They spoke loud, and the noise they made drowned the sweet flow of that pretty, prattling voice—flowing, like some clear purling brook, over shining pebbles—forgive the comparison, but I never heard sweet Moggie speak—for there was a something of the Moggie left in her still—and chattering away in the pretty manner she did when she was in spirits, without thinking of it.

Of course we talked of my late travels. Of course she was interested in every adventure and detail; and, of course—do me the justice to believe that—I did not make the philo-

sopher Lenham the hero of the story. How merrily she laughed when I related Albert's adventures!—his little scrapes, and his little disasters. How gaily she smiled and questioned, and laughed again—and the sweet gravity which came over her face when I threw in an incident or two which gave evidence of higher merits than those of mere enterprise and insatiable love of adventure. How the colour rose, and the pretty eye twinkled—and, in a very suspicious way, upon one or two occasions (once, I am certain), I caught the delicate finger brushing something away from it.

Eugene sat opposite to us, at the side of Laura. At first he talked to her, but in a careless manner, as mere common civility required; but she, poor girl, as usual, interpreting his attention according to her wishes, was evidently more than satisfied. She looked beautiful; and once or twice he gazed with admiration—but, by and by, his eye was attracted to our side of the table.

He seemed watching us, and soon began to look displeased and out of sorts. I almost believe he was doing me the honour to be jealous of *me*! But I was, much as I liked her, fancy free—invulnerable—for I considered her as belonging to my friend. As for Imogene, she never once turned her eyes his way—but chatted on, absorbed in one subject, and felt not the influences of that evil eye which lowered upon us.

“But I dare say he will not come after all—Lady Faulconer said he would probably be here at dinner.”

I did not in the least expect him to dinner—I told her so, but added, “I am certain he will be at the ball to-night. You know he promised his aunt Ulick, and he will keep his promise,—even if there were no other reason why he is certain to come.”

She coloured; and there was such a pretty little conscious laugh.

Eugene, I saw, was beginning to look

daggers at me—I was quite afraid she would observe it, and that it would disturb her. I was glad when the sign was made for the ladies to withdraw. I saw Imogene attempt to take Laura's arm as they left the room; but Laura turned away rather rudely. Imogene only put up her pretty lips a little, and left her to herself. She was used to slight caprices of temper upon the part of her young friend, and had learned that the best way was not to care; to let the little breeze blow over, as such breezes, when left to themselves, usually do.

Humming a tune in a low voice, she made her escape into a moderately-sized conservatory, into which the dining-room opened; and amused herself with examining the plants, and admiring flowers and ferns, but her thoughts were wandering far away among the orange groves of the East, which I had been describing to her.

Country balls are early affairs, especially when you have to go some five miles to

attend them. We had coffee, and were assembled in the hall, ready for starting, before nine o'clock.

It was proposed that there should be a mingling of parties. Eugene was offered a place in Lady Ulick's carriage; and I, with a certain Mrs. Hewit—wife of a small gentleman in the neighbourhood, who had no carriage, only a fly, and whom Imogene, upon that account, I believe, had asked to be so good-natured as to chaperon her—it was arranged, was to go in the Haughton carriage; but Eugene broke through this arrangement, in his usual decisive manner, somewhat roughly saying, that he choose to go as he came.

Therefore Imogene had Mrs. Hewit's company to herself, and literally to herself, I believe; for once installed in the carriage, Eugene threw himself back in the corner, never once spoke, and slept, or pretended to sleep, during the entire drive. Mrs. Hewit meanwhile enlightened Miss Aubrey in the

mysteries of rearing Guinea-fowls and Pea-chicks, which, for some reason or other, they had not succeeded well in doing at Haughton.

And oh ! what a bore she thought Mrs. Hewit—did she not ?

Not in the least—She evidently took quite an interest in the talk—Eugene despised her for it in his proud heart—gossiping about the poultry-yard with that commonplace Mrs. Hewit, as if it was the most interesting subject in the world.

But Imogene was like Burke—universal. She managed to extract something worth listening to from every one, because she was thoroughly good-natured as well as thoroughly well bred. Her desire to give pleasure made her instinctively select the subjects that were most formed to please those with whom she conversed, being of course such as they best understood ; and her gentle facility, and exemption from the slightest shadow of implied superiority,

or condescension, set every one at ease. Mrs. Hewit was quite in love with her before she got out of the carriage, and declared afterwards she never had had a more delightful drive than with that charming girl ; and Imogene learned how to manage her Pea-chicks, about which she was much interested ; and I sincerely hope had, as she deserved, her reward in rearing flocks of the beautiful creatures such as once peopled the woods of magnificent Stow.

Eugene had not recovered his ill-humour when he handed her out of the carriage, and they together entered the crowded passage of the inn where the assembly rooms were.

"What can make you look such a knight of the sour—rather than doleful countenance?" she asked, merrily.

"How can you, Imogene?—How could you keep chattering on with that tiresome old woman—I declare you lay out for popularity on all sides, till it makes one sick."

She laughed.

"Don't be cross! If I lay out for popularity, I have to do it for two, I am sure; you may stand, some day or other, for the county."

"Nonsense!—You only do it because your desire of pleasing is insatiable."

"Pleasing myself, do you mean?—for I *was* pleasing myself."

"There is something low—inherently low-bred—I mean in the sense of family descent," he said, with haughty disgust, "in this taste for inferior company. I declare, Imogene, if it were not that I know the Aubrey's are good blood, I should think there was almost a bar in your escutcheon. It's not like other people. You don't do it as a matter of proper condescension, and show that you mean it so, by always taking care to maintain your proper place. You actually seem as if you liked it—as if it came natural to you—as if you were one of them."

"And so I am—and so I try to seem

when I am with them. Condescension ! I should be ashamed to think of such a thing. Nonsense, Eugene ! The difference is less than you think. It depends mostly upon what people's daily business is. Yours may be in the stars, like a sublime poet as you are—but mine is about dirty floors and well-dusted corners, and good little boys and girls, and all sorts of household matters ; and therefore I am no better—and I hold myself no better—than any of the rest who can talk sense, and who understand their own business. What a silly, silly, conceited boy you are yet, Eugene ! I thought you were more of a man !—I am quite ashamed of you ! ”

Looking up in his face as she said this, with such a loving yet wicked smile, that one should have thought the very demon himself would have stood rebuked, and found it irresistible. Not he—he looked sulky still.

CHAPTER VII.

Love's message travell'd by the nerves and eye,
In current deep and still;
As harp strings answer to the zephyr's sigh.

MRS. ACTON TINDAL.

THE Assembly Room, as it was there called, was rather a handsome apartment, which, through the exertions of the town and neighbourhood, had been added to the somewhat obscure and old mansion which claimed to be the principal inn of the place.

Through a low, narrow, gloomy passage, now crowded with bustling people, they made their way as well as they could to the cloaking-room, and thence to the ball-room.

There was a great air of business and

much hurry and confusion throughout the house. Waiters scouring about, summoned here and called to there, and vainly answering with the "Anon, anon, sir," of poor Francis the Drawer. Carriages were rapidly succeeding each other, driving up and setting down; young men to be seen hastily entering and running up the old shaking stairs to their dressing-rooms. Young ladies anxious about "the wheel" blocking up the way, whilst they paused to examine whether their dresses had escaped uninjured; too intent upon the interesting inquiry to notice how the delay might inconvenience others. Impatient old gentlemen hurrying their wives and daughters, with sundry small oaths, along. Mammas anxiously shielding their flocks from injury to their trimmings by the crush in the passage. In short, it was the usual display of that individual selfishness of a crowd, where every one has to take care of himself, and, in the old phrase, look after Number One.

bright; the smile of her pretty mouth exchanged for a somewhat doleful expression—kept looking incessantly at the door, as fresh group succeeded to group.

But he whom she sought came not.

At last, pretty innocent thing, she turned her asking eyes to me.

As if I were answerable for him.

I stood near her—stooped down—and answered by—

“Depend upon it, he will come.”

There seemed but one *he* between her and myself.

She brightened up at the renewed assurance, and gave her hand cheerfully to Eugene, who came to claim her for the first quadrille.

It was really a very pretty quadrille; and, as I stood looking at it, and listening to the spirit-stirring strains of the somewhat noisy band, I began to think that there was nothing upon this earth much better worth seeing than a good ball.

Remember, I was scarcely more than a youth myself.

I took much pleasure in watching Eugene and his partner, they both danced so gracefully ; and having, of course, been accustomed to dance together, fell into each other's mode with a harmony of motion which was really beautiful. It reminded one of Perdita's dancing—" Like a wave of the sea !"

But those eyes—those wandering eyes—at every pause still sought the doorway in vain.

At last, just as she finished one of the figures, and turned to her place, she caught a face appearing opposite to her, above the crowd which was assembled round the dancers—and did she not colour high, all the hues of the fairest roses, whilst one bright gleam flashed from that eye, which instantly sank beneath his ?

The next moment she had raised it again, as if to assure herself that it was really he—but he was no longer there.

But he had only disappeared for a mo-

ment, making his way round behind the crowd towards her; and whilst she stood waiting, as her cavalier was performing his share of the figure, a voice, to her like Heaven's own music, murmured soft and low in her ear:—

“And how is Imogene?”

She looked up, and she looked down, whilst her hand slid shyly into his, which was held out to seize it. Oh! if you had but seen her face!—I may say his face too.

That fine, manly, high-spirited countenance, is full of tenderness and inexpressible joy.

But the dance again summoned her — he drew a few paces back, and she floated on.

Floated! For was it not beautiful? Such indescribable softness in every motion — such tender, almost divine felicity, beaming from that sweet countenance.

He gazed, I could see, like one enraptured and almost drunk with happiness: and well

he might—who could have resisted that sweet expression of innocent joy?

When she came to her place again—

“You are not engaged for the next dances?”

“Oh, no!”

“You dance with me.”

A sweet look, which said as plainly as look could say it, “To be sure I do!”

The dance was over; Eugene led his partner to her seat; Albert walked upon the other side. Having seated her, Eugene took himself away, in search of other amusement, and Albert dropped into the vacant place beside Imogene.

And then! oh, then! were not the barriers of reserve unloosed, and did not the current of felicity flow!

So much to be told!—so much to be asked!—She so blushing happy, and he looking down upon her bending head with that ineffable expression of manly tenderness which makes the countenance

of a man who is thoroughly and rightly attached, in my opinion, the most interesting spectacle in nature.

They were soon summoned, by the sound of the waltz, to join the dancers; and away they flew, almost dizzy with felicity.

Next they danced a quadrille together—and afterwards they sat down once more; and it was not until then that Albert, summoning courage, began—

“ You expected me to night—you felt certain that I *must* come.”

“ I hoped, and yet I feared . . . I began to think you never would arrive, when, just then, I spied you out.”

“ I would have come,” he said, vehemently, “ though the earth itself had opened and yawned between, to separate us.”

She looked down and smiled softly.

“ Perhaps,” he said, “ you may guess why I would have come—why I *must* have come. I feel shy—I feel afraid—and yet you will not, *you* will not think me pre-

sumptuous, Imogene ! Others may—you will understand me.

She spoke not, but her hand began to tremble a little.

“ May I ? Yes I may—yes I will. “ Were these flowers,”—and he drew a little bunch of withered Forget-me-nots from his bosom—“ were these flowers—what I believed them then to be—a silent pledge, that if I did as you bade me—and I have tried with all my soul’s strength to do it—that the time would come when I might . . . ask you to be mine, Imogene ?

She could not speak—her heart throbbed so fast. ♦

It was said—It was said. Now they were one. She knew it was to be—she had considered herself engaged to him all along ; but now the barrier between them was thrown down—It was no longer a hope, it was a fact !

She was his for ever.

One glance flashed up in answer to his

appeal, and then the little hand stole towards his, took the forget-me-nots, and kissed them.

It was the seal of their betrothment.

She was engaged to dance the two next dances with me. It was a quadrille, for that was the extent of my accomplishments in this line; but you could scarcely believe it was the same creature before you. She scarcely seemed to know what she was about; and she was so absent, and danced so carelessly, that Laura and Eugene, who were her *vis à vis*, exclaimed and scolded. Eugene, with his usual peremptory way of speaking, aroused her. She looked up, as though she was suddenly awakened from a dream, and scarcely understood what he said.

"What are you about, Imogene? Do please to mind. What *can* you be thinking of?"

"I'll try to do better," she answered, looking confused, and as if endeavouring to recollect herself.

"Oh, I am so glad it is over!" she cried, as, hanging upon my arm, I was taking her to her seat.

"Thank you," I said, laughing, "it must be a great bore, of course, to dance with me."

She answered with such a tell-tale smile.

The rest of that evening of felicity was passed in a sort of dream. "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion we were like them that dream."—Blessed ought they to esteem themselves who even *once*, in the course of the longest life, have experienced the full meaning of that sentence.

The order of our return was a little altered from that of our coming. Lady Faulconer contrived that herself, her son, and Imogene, should return alone in the Drystoke carriage.

I believe she was aware with what intentions Albert had come down, but she made

no allusion to what had passed; a glance exchanged with her son had satisfied her that he had sped. She only betrayed her satisfaction by a still more than ordinary tenderness in her manner to Imogene, and a something there was, unlike her usual self—but which filled Imogene's heart with affectionate pleasure.

Those who truly love, extend their love to every one connected with the beloved one. Albert's mother became dear to her almost as her own; his father and his sisters were beloved because they were his. Every person and thing in which he had a part, even my unworthy self included, came in for a share of her overflowing affection.

The next day Imogene was to return home. Eugene had at first intended to accompany her; but a great coursing match—there were still coursing matches in this remote county—was to come off that day; partly, I believe, a device of Lord Ulick's, to keep his company together;

partly of Lady Faulconer's to detain Eugene.

Several other plans were devised for the general amusement, and Eugene seemed well-inclined to accept the invitations pressed upon him.

They wanted to keep Imogene; but she pleaded that her mother was alone, and she could not leave her longer.

She was, indeed, most impatient to return home, to relate what had passed, and receive those congratulations so dear to the heart, which a young girl looks for from her mother, when, hiding her face in her bosom, she tells the sweet tale, and confesses she is happy.

She would not let Albert accompany her, under the circumstances. A sense of propriety rendered that impossible; and, besides, she really wished to see her mother alone, to have those first sacred moments of confidence all to herself, for she loved her mother dearly, and had long felt secure of

that return of warm affection, which, in earlier and less happy years, she had so coveted. It was agreed between the two, then, that Imogene should be the bearer of a note from Albert; and that he should follow in the evening, and arrive at the early tea, substituted for the late dinner, when Imogene and her mother were alone.

And so they parted.

He put her into the carriage—Eugene let him have it his own way. He and Imogene were so much like brother and sister that he was in the habit of ceding these little privileges to others, as is the manner of properly-behaved brothers. I fancied I saw him casting one or two somewhat sinister looks at Albert in the course of the morning, whilst we were dawdling about, waiting for the various equipages to come up and carry off departing guests—that of Imogene being the last; but he suffered himself to be a good deal engrossed with Laura, who indeed looked splendidly handsome,

flushed as she was with hope and happiness.

Hope and happiness, as it grieved me to believe, which had its principal source in the credulity of wishing; for Eugene's manner was still very equivocal, and would have been very unsatisfactory to one more accustomed to the self-discipline of schooling her imagination than poor Laura Faulconer.

"Good bye, dear," was Eugene's farewell. "Tell your mother not to expect me—I shall probably not be home for a week or so—they seem quite jolly out here."

The Haughton Hall carriage drove up—Albert having placed Imogene in it, the door was shut; he stopped, and, leaning against the panel, whispered a few more last words, as she bent her head to the window—then turned abruptly away, as the carriage disappeared down the walk which led to the shrubberies, and we saw him no more that day.

He did not join the coursing match—and when the party assembled to a late dinner, we were told that Albert Faulconer was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

LONGFELLOW.

IMOGENE ran lightly up to her mother's dressing-room. She knew she should find her there. It was an apartment which Lady Emma always occupied when slightly indisposed. It had a whole history of love and sorrow attached, and in it she took a melancholy pleasure.

The young and happy creature opened the door. Her mother was lying upon the sofa, as usual, and was gazing thoughtfully—her still beautiful face rendered more lovely, by

the tender sadness of the expression—upon the wide-spreading prospect outside.

“My children!” turning round; “Dear ones! You are good to come so early—but where is Eugene?”

“There was a coursing match, and they persuaded him to stay.”

“And why did not you stay? How is he to get back?”

“I did not want to stay—I wanted to come here to you, mamma; besides it is uncertain, he bade me say, when he should come home; there are gay doings going on out there. He will write when I am to send the dog-cart for him.”

“Well, my darling, as you *are* come, I will own I am very glad to have you. One gets old and sadly dependent upon the love of others, my Moggie.”

“Oh, mamma, and little Moggie is so glad when her mammie wishes for her,” said she, planting herself on her old low seat, the footstool, and caressingly creeping up close to her mother.

“Dear thing,” said Lady Emma, affectionately; then lifting up the face which was already burying itself in the folds of her mother’s dress—“Let me look at you. You don’t look quite—quite the child I sent away. What is it, love? Surely”...with an expression of hope and expectation breaking like golden sun-beams from behind a heavy clouded sky—“Can anything have happened very particular—very interesting? No, no; he is so young. And yet not, perhaps, too young. Speak, my Imogene!”

“Oh, mamma! mamma! Have you—can you have guessed?”

“Yes, my pretty one, I do begin to guess. Well, well—hide your face if you like; but just tell me—just whisper me that my Imogene is happy.”

“The angels in heaven are not happier,” in a low voice.

Lady Emma stooped down and kissed the shining hair, for the face was still buried in the white folds of her garment—whilst Imo-

gene, overpowered by this tenderness of sympathy, shed a few silent, grateful tears.

Then her hand, which held a small folded paper, stole gently up, and placed it in her mother's.

Lady Emma opened it, but, without looking at the superscription, uttered a loud shriek—and dashing from the sofa, sprang to the floor, and stood there with the aspect of a fury, holding the letter above her head in her clenched hand.

“Mother!—Mother!” cried Imogene, springing up in her turn; and throwing herself upon her knees before her, she clasped her in her arms. “Mamma!—Mamma!”

But Lady Emma thrust her away.

“Treachery! You have deceived me!”—she cried.

“The poor girl remained on her knees, trembling violently, between terror and amazement; unable to speak, and utterly unconscious of the cause for this desperate

outburst of passion. She began to think her mother was suddenly gone mad, as, tearing the letter into a thousand atoms, she flung them desperately away—and throwing herself once more upon the sofa, again buried her face in the cushions, and rather shrieked than groaned.

Imogene remained shivering and trembling where she was—so horror-struck and astounded that she actually could not move. At last her mother started up from the cushion, and, half raising herself, with a face filled with rage and despair, cried out in a terrible voice:—

“ Wretched girl ! What have you been doing ? ”

The sound of her mother’s voice restored Imogene to her senses. She turned towards her, and, still upon her kness, said—

“ Mother ! What have I done ? ”

“ Done !—done !—You have killed me.”

And then her inflamed and heated countenance changed to such a ghastly paleness,

that Imogene, terrified almost out of her senses, flew for water, and, throwing her arm round her mother, attempted to convey the glass to her lips.

Her mother shook her off.

"It's of no use—it's all over!"—she faintly muttered between her teeth.

Imogene was bewildered with terror. She felt certain that her mother had been seized with a sudden paroxysm of delirium, and began to think of calling for help.

"You are very ill, mamma," she said soothingly—"let me ring! We must have advice directly."

"Stop!" cried Lady Emma, authoritatively laying her hand upon her arm—"Don't ring—I am not *ill*. Oh, no—no—no!"—she ran on wildly, "I am not *ill*!"—and then she burst into a flood of tears.

It was a relief to see her weep, even though so violently, and large tears of sympathy ran down the hapless girl's cheeks.

Lady Emma looked up at her. She could

not misinterpret that countenance of honest pity and bewilderment.

"I was unjust," she said, with her usual prompt candour, after she had been impatient and wrong. "I said treachery—Imogene, you are incapable of treachery. But, oh!—woe! woe! woe!—wretched! wretched! wretched child!—woe! woe! upon us all."

"Dear mother—let me . . . Pray—pray—" endeavouring once more to throw her arms round her—"Pray, pray, compose yourself—tell me what is the matter—there must be some reason—some strange reason for all this."

"Oh, yes!—reason! reason enough!" cried her mother, woefully shaking her head.

"May I know it, mamma?—May I share it? I am not a child now," said Imogene gently, kneeling down again by her mother's side, and laying her cheek to hers.

Lady Emma did not repulse her this time. Better feelings were taking place of the first

rage of disappointment ; she began to feel for Imogene herself, at last.

“ Know ?—Imogene !—Know ?—Yes, you *must* know. Child ! child !—You don’t love Albert Faulconer very—very much, I hope.”

“ For life and death,” was the answer, with something of a religious solemnity.

She had long considered herself as his wife ; she had looked upon the engagement between them as sacred and irrevocable.

“ But it must not be—It cannot be—Do you know *that*, poor child ! Oh, Imogene ! Don’t turn so pale—and, above all, don’t look so resolved,” she said, shrinking back, as if in terror.

“ Mother—forgive me—in everything else—But here, it is as if the Almighty himself had bound us together.”

“ Oh, blaspheme not his holy, holy name ! child of deceit—which God abhors ! offspring of falsehood—which God curses ! How can his blessing light on you ?”

“ I am the child,” said Imogene, lifting

up her head gravely, "neither of deceit nor falsehood. No deceit have I intentionally used; and those from whom I spring were truth itself. Mother, you are truth itself—I have always thought so of my father. I never tried—I never intended to hide this thing from you. I did not know whether it would come to anything. I knew, indeed, my own heart, but I did not think myself bound to tell that secret to any one. Why should I? I knew Albert would go out into the world. I knew the value of a boy's fancy. I determined quietly to wait till he had time to see, and opportunity to choose. I had not the least suspicion it was wrong, but I thought it a sort of duty not to give words—not to give a body of words to my affection till I knew whether it would be returned as I wished—as I ought to wish it to be. There was something in me—something I could not resist—which made me hide my feelings till that time came. Indeed, indeed, mamma, it was not deceit!

but a sort of shame. You know, mamma, one cannot help it—it is our nature; so don't be angry, mamma, pray—don't be offended. Did I not come to you as soon I could, and tell you all? And has he not written in the humblest terms to beg your consent? But ah! you have torn his letter all to bits."

"I see, I see," sobbed Lady Emma.

"Then mamma, dear mamma," again taking her hand, and looking imploringly into her face, "say you are not angry with us—say you are not angry with *him*. Indeed he did not mean to offend you. He would have done anything rather than displease you; and so would I."

Lady Emma had risen up, and sat burying her face in her handkerchief. She was weeping bitterly,—but, at these words, she lowered the handkerchief from her face, and, with a piteous expression, looked into her daughter's pleading eyes.

The darkness of her own; the deep mys-

terious darkness as of death—terrified the young girl again.

“Mamma,” she said, “there is something—there is something—I don’t know.”

“Yes, my child,” grasping the hand which lay upon her knee, and holding it there with a convulsive force like a vice, “there is—there is—something dreadful! something horrible! which, poor child! you don’t—don’t know.”

“Let me know it, then,” said Imogene, with resolution.

“You must—You shall!” she answered solemnly. Then, as she was about to begin her explanation, she burst forth into a fresh agony of tears, and fell back crying, “Oh, that this task should be mine! That the burden should be laid upon me! It will kill her! it will kill her!—And, after all, she *is* my own child.”

Then, recovering herself, she sat upright again, and laying hold of both Imogene’s hands as she knelt before her, held them

there—and, looking upon her again with an expression not to be described, she began—

“Child! You believe in God.”

Imogene reverently bent her head.

That she did, and served Him from the depth of her heart, and with all the strength of her young, generous will.

“Can you? Have you—done *that*, which at your age I had not done—endeavoured to obey Him from your childhood in simplicity and truth. Have you done this?”

“I have tried”—in a faltering voice.

“Then—turn to Him now.”

And did she not?

She felt something dreadful was at hand. She lifted up her good and innocent heart. Come what would, she had a rock on which to rest.

“You are a good, dear child,”—Lady Emma went on—“So good, I have wondered at and envied you.”

“And loved me, mamma, a little,” she whispered plaintively—

“ And learned at last to love you, dear, good girl, as my own soul ”—said her mother, fervently.

Then she was silent, as if confused and abstracted. She had forgotten what she was going to say.

“ But, mamma, you have not told me ”—said Imogene, gently.

“ Aye, true ! ”—like one returning nervously to a dreaded task.

“ Told you !—what was it?—what was I to do ? ”

Her eyes wandered strangely.

“ Why, Albert and I ” . . . ?

The name recalled her at once to herself.

“ Oh, yes—yes—yes—I know ! ”—She shook her head, as if to chase the dizziness and confusion that was coming over her, and, looking again firmly into her daughter’s eyes, said—“ You wish to marry Albert Faulconer, I think.”

“ I do, mother ! ” in a low voice, colouring.

“And you believe,” Lady Emma went on, becoming more and more excited as she spoke, “that you are the heiress of Haughton Hall, and you are proud to carry this rich inheritance to the man you love?—You are mistaken.—You *may* be the possessor, but you are not the heiress, of Haughton.”

Imogene looked as if waiting for explanation.

“The law—human law!—which deals in externals, and knows nothing of their hidden realities—may have awarded you this estate—but before the tribunal of conscience!—In His eyes, who is himself truth—who sees into the hidden secrets of things, and is not to be mocked by vain appearances—you have no more right to this estate than the most miserable beggar that ever crawled to you for alms.”

“Mamma, you are very ill!”—cried Imogene, excessively terrified, and endeavouring to rise, as if to get assistance; but her mother held her down.

“No, I am not ill!—I am not mad!—though well may I seem so to you, for the tale I have to tell passes the wildest dreams of frenzy. Ah! my child, my child!”—again melting into tears—“That I should have to tell this tale to you—my dear, good child.”

The terrors of Imogene now began to take a new form—some awful revelation seemed to be really approaching. She felt very sick, and could only give a sign to her mother, imploring her to proceed.

“My Imogene, it is the law of our human condition. The child must bear the iniquity of the father—the innocent suffer for the guilty. The bleeding lamb on Abel’s first altar was a type . . . The grand sacrifice—which was the grand victory—all tell us the same thing.”

“*I shall not have to suffer so for my father*”—was all that Imogene said.

Her mother did not seem to hear her—she went on:—

“There has been an awful crime committed; and it was followed by a second crime. Two acts of black domestic treason—such as the Father of all the families upon earth abhors—and you,” looking steadily at her, “will be the atoning victim.”

And at once, as if melted to the heart by the thought of her daughter's fate, she threw her arms round her, fell upon her neck, and wept bitterly.

Nothing could have softened the anguish of the present moment to the terrified and astonished girl, like this honest emotion upon the part of her mother. She pressed her tenderly to her bosom, whispering—“Dear, dear mamma!”

These passionate bursts of tears relieved Lady Emma, and, it is probable, preserved her senses. She recovered herself again, and went on:—

“Prepare yourself with all that courage with which you have been endowed—arm yourself for the great task which lies before

you—the offering up an enormous sacrifice to right and justice.”

“Tell me what it is—and Heaven give me grace to do His holy will.”

“There has been a great crime committed—two crimes—and you at this moment profit by them. The wrong that has been done, they tell me, clings to you; like that poisoned robe the wicked woman presented, the gift of a more wicked being still—it sticks to you—you cannot, so they tell me, tear it off. You have been from your childhood—you must go on still—enjoying the fruits of another’s deceit, and withholding from him to whom it is justly due, those possessions which are no more rightfully yours—I repeat it—than the veriest beggar’s that ever crawled to your gate.”

Paler and paler Imogene grew; but she spoke not: she continued to listen.

“One way, and one only way, remains to do what is righteous and just, and restore to the rightful owner that

of which he has been so wrongfully deprived."

"Tell me what it is, and I will do it."

"You will! you will! Oh! bless you for that word! But will you, indeed? Dear girl, will you?"

"Whatever is right I will do."

"There is but one way—one only way remaining—to redeem the past, and restore the right heir to his place. Listen, Imogene, not one drop of the blood of Aubrey flows in your veins; but the true heir—the doubly wronged—the twice defrauded—lives, and the property must be restored to him."

"And so it shall! Prove what you say, and as readily will I throw off all these trappings that envelop me, as the dust of my mortal vesture when summoned from the grave."

"Aye but—"

"Does Mr. Glenroy know all this?" Imogene went on. "Make me understand . . . If not an Aubrey, what am I, then? What are you?"

"I am William Craven, the gamekeeper's, son's wife; and you are his child."

"How?"

"You remember Alice Craven."

"To be sure—I do."

"She was your father's mother."

She then went on, with as much composure as she could command, to detail the events which had happened. Imogene listened with profound attention. Her face was perfectly colourless; her eyes, serious and calm, were fixed upon her mother's face. Now and then she slightly shuddered. Now and then a trembling, like that of a sudden gust of wind passing among the forest trees, passed over her limbs.

Lady Emma at length came to the second part of her narrative, and began, with a hesitating voice and crimsoning cheek, to enter upon that most terrible subject; impelled by a strong—a Spartan sense of duty.

But here Imogene stopped her.

"Pray do not tell me anything painful about papa. I think I understand, that, for

some reason or other, you think, that even if he had been Mr. Aubrey's son, Haughton ought not to be mine; that is enough—I can bear the rest . . . but I don't know how I could bear hearing anything against papa."

And saying this she quietly folded her head up in a large shawl that happened to be lying near, and resting it against the arm of the sofa, sat perfectly still for some time.

Her mother respected her silence, and, exhausted by the effort she had made, leaned back and quietly waited for Imogene to speak next.

Suddenly she started up, threw the shawl from her head, and seemed about to quit the room.

"Where are you going, my dear?"

"I have a letter to write—there is no time to lose."

"You will come back again to me."

"Yes, mamma."

She had suddenly recollected that Albert

was to be at Haughton this very evening. To meet him in the present utter confusion of her ideas, and before she had been able so far to collect herself as even to understand her situation, was impossible. To-morrow she would see him ; but he should be spared the shock of this unexpected reverse to-night. He should not be struck down by a thunderbolt as she had been. She would prepare him, and she would see him to-morrow. Yes, come what would of it, one resolution she was able to form—she would see Albert again, and she would see him to-morrow.

She wrote a few hasty lines, to prepare him in some degree for disappointment and sorrow ; begging him to be with her between twelve and one o'clock the next day, and, in the meantime, to give no hint of the contents of her note to any one. She took it to Nurse, and begged her to go herself to the stables, and dispatch a groom with orders to carry it by the lower road to the

Hazles, and if he met Mr. Faulconer by the way, to give it to him.

This little exertion somewhat relieved her ; but when it was over, she seemed first thoroughly to awaken to a sense of what had happened. To the mind it is as to the body : we are not at the first moment sensible to the full pain of a tremendous blow.

As she slowly returned to her mother's room, her perceptions returned, and with them came the bewildering sense of a fall—of an overthrow—a stupifying, unintelligible catastrophe and change. She was—and she was no longer herself.

Who was she?—What was she?

But soon the impatience to know more revived ; she as yet knew nothing definite of the change in her own position. She was no longer the heiress of the Aubreys. She was a portionless dependant—the child of a dependant—that was all she as yet had understood. Some obscure hints ; something

more to be told of that Edward, there was—
She must know all.

She entered her mother's room with a certain impatience.

Her mother looked up, and motioned her to her place upon that low seat at her knee again.

"And now, mamma," said Imogene—"there is more to tell me. Is the person that is wronged still living?"

"You have heard Edward Aubrey's name mentioned, Imogene. Of course, he must be the person to whom this estate rightfully belongs."

"But he is dead."

"I know not—But this I know—he has left a son."

A flush of joy brightened her face, as, clasping her hands, she said—

"Then, restitution may yet be made."

Her mother sighed.

"Yes, restitution *may* yet be made. To effect it I have agonised, prayed, and la-

boured. Imogene, have you no idea who that son of Edward Aubrey may be?"

"How should I—I have never seen him."

"It is Eugene!"

She started up.

"Eugene! my brother Eugene!—that I have loved so long as my own, own brother. Then he is my cousin. Ah, no," her countenance falling, "not *my* cousin—not anything to *me*—I am nobody now."

"Not your brother—not your cousin—but more—far more, far more, I hope and believe. My dear, good Imogene—be patient and be reasonable—for I am going to task your patience and your reason to the utmost. Things have been so inexplicably, so unfortunately settled—that you cannot repair the wrong that has been done, except in one way; and that is—by giving up yourself, with your estates."

"How, mamma?" looking quite bewildered.

"I spoke of the robe of Dejanira just

now, did I not," said her mother, with much emotion; "poor child, these almost princely trappings in which you have been decked will prove that fatal robe to you."

"I know, mother," she said; "I understand—I cannot be forced to part with all this—you have told me the law cannot take it from me. I see—already I see," she went on, warming as she spoke, "the horrible temptation that lies before me. It sounds an easy thing—but it is not an easy thing to part with all—all one has so loved—as I have loved these things. My life! my hope! my joy! my work! It will be very hard to do it—very, very hard—and time will not make it go easier, but harder with me—the more I think the harder it will be. It is already harder than it felt half-an-hour ago—but, so help me, Heaven—and Heaven *will* help an honest heart—but I will tear this poisoned vesture from me, though I let out my life blood in doing it."

Lady Emma actually groaned aloud.

"Fear me not, mother," the young heroine went on—a sort of lustrous glory beaming in her eyes.

"But you do not, even yet, know all! Will this horrible revelation never be completed?"—with a cry of agony.

"What, more!—What, more!

"Did I not tell you—did I not say—there is but one way. You cannot—such are the legal difficulties of the case—rid yourself of the wrong. You cannot give away the estate except you give yourself away with it—and, therefore, is it—"

She went on with a frenzied violence, as if again losing all command of herself.

"Therefore is it that I brought Eugene here—in order that you might learn to love each other from the first, and that, in due time, you might be all in all to each other—And therefore is it that I told you at first. Did I not tell you? No I didn't. I ought to have known—you ought to have guessed—that any other marriage but this for you

was impossible—that every law of conscience, justice, and honour, commands you to be the wife of Eugene Aubrey.”

“Nothing can command that,” said Imogene, firmly, “for that is impossible.”

“Impossible!—Impossible to make the only restitution in your power?—Wretched girl!”

“Impossible, mother!” repeated Imogene.

Her mother almost glared at her as she said, in a strange, unnatural voice—

“And you must keep these unholy gains.”

“This estate is not rightfully *mine*—I will *not* keep it.”

“Then you must give it, and yourself with it, to Eugene ; for there is no other way.”

“I hope . . . I do not believe . . . I will write to Mr. Glenroy ; I will speak to Mr. Elmsley. I am very young and inexperienced, and my heart throbs so, I do not know what I say—and I think I do not know what I am about, very well. I am only able to feel certain of one thing—that it would be the wickedest thing in the world for *me* to

marry Eugene Aubrey—and that I will not do it.”

Alas ! but before this terrible day had ended—before she laid her head upon her pillow, how was her simple direct sense of what was right, perplexed and confused ?

Things which under other circumstances would have appeared to her as deep sins, now clothed themselves in the garments of angels of light. Inconstancy to the sacred sentiments of the heart—that treason to the most holy of human feelings—assumed the features of a noble and righteous sacrifice to truth and honour. Fidelity to her promises, to the long-understood pledges of her faith, could only be maintained at the expense of perseverance in one of the most atrocious instances of robbery and wrong which was ever effected by one human creature upon another.

In the silent watches of the night, com-

muning with her own heart—before that inner tribunal, which may be silenced, but cannot be made to lie—Imogene began to question with herself, and to doubt.

She could not rest—sleep was impossible, though she kept trying for it. Well aware of the necessity of preserving her nerves from disorder in this great crisis of her fate, so that no physical derangement of those mysterious-instruments of thought and action should interfere with the clear discrimination of where her duty lay, and a courageous resolution to discharge it.

For, ah! that duty—which way did it, indeed, lie?

She rose up, and in her long white dressing-gown, like some sad spectre—her cheek almost as bloodless and pale—no colour but that of her hair relieving the sepulchral hue of her garments—she paced up and down the corridor into which her room opened, and in which a lamp at one end was always kept burning. The moon,

through a window at the other end, threw broad masses of light upon the floor, as with an almost ominous aspect—as it appeared to the unhappy girl's imagination—she waded through black, heavy clouds, that hung like sable curtains round her.

Sometimes pausing at the window, and gazing disconsolately forth, then returning to her slow and measured walk in the corridor—up and down, up and down—so Imogene passed great part of the night.

Then feeling a little better, she would go back into her room, and, laying her throbbing head upon her pillow, would try to sleep.

But sleep came not—"The wretched He forsakes."

Then she would rise from her pillow, again drink a glass of water, to moisten her parched lips, and resume her walk, and her endeavours at resignation and composure.

She would, and she did, cast herself upon Him!

“The Father of the fatherless, and the Husband of the widow, is God in His holy habitation.”

The text seemed whispered into her mind, as if by the voice of a kind friend, breathing within the sanctuary.

Poor young thing !

She was fatherless, and she was a widow; for her heart assured her but too sadly, that, decide as she might in other respects, Albert and she were parted for ever.

Yet, when, calmed and soothed by the strength of that heavenly rest which she had sought, she began to look round upon her prospect, one comfort peeped sweetly upon her—almost to the banishing of all other considerations. Come what would, she would see him to-morrow. One more meeting of ineffable tenderness and trust! If they must part, of that moment of bliss nobody should deprive her! Besides, she rested upon Albert. She had as perfect a confidence in his good sense, in his rectitude,

in his truth and honour, as in his tender affection and love.

He was her friend as well as her lover—he would show her what was right.

Thus beginning to feel a little supported and comforted, she thought of other things : of her two friends,—Mr. Glenroy, who loved her like his own child, and Mr. Elmsley, so calm, so gentle, yet so firm and immoveable in his convictions.

And her eye was lifted up with a less troubled light in it. He who had already provided such friends in her calamity, had been, as He had promised, a shelter from the heat—"like the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land." There was a refuge in her distress, and a way to resolve her doubts and scruples beforehand, as it were, provided.

It was as if, before the thunderbolt fell and shattered the proud edifice of her fortunes, a little cabin had been raised for her under the shade of old and well-loved trees. Thus it was, at least, that her excited

imagination, in this great crisis of life, represented it.

And so, by soft degrees, more soothing thoughts stole over her.

She had found that on which to rest ; and the whirling confusion of her mind subsided.

Once more she stood at the window. And now, the sable clouds had rolled away, and, like soft fleeces of silver, the vapoury tissue hung round the placid moon, which seemed to look upon her with a loving stillness, telling of other and better worlds than this.

And so she stood till soft, quiet, patient tears began to steal from her eyes.

At length, the gentle influence spread over her. Her eyelids became heavy—her throbbing pulses still—and, returning to her bed, she fell asleep, and slept with an infant's peace till morning.

CHAPTER IX.

——— Oh, Heavens !

Why does my blood thus muster to my heart,
Making both it unable for itself,
And dispossest all my other parts
Of necessary fitness ?

SHAKESPEARE.

———

LADY EMMA, when they had parted, was left, if possible, in a state still more deplorable than her daughter.

A confused sense of having been wrong added to the cruel pain of her feelings.

Her intentions and wishes seemed to have been right, and in that respect she stood acquitted to herself—but she could not feel so well satisfied with the feelings she had indulged.

She had suffered herself, from the first

discovery of the terrible secret, to be influenced by it in a way the most strange and unnatural, as regarded her innocent child.

How little !—her accusing heart now told her—had she, in all her ceaseless, anxious ponderings upon the subject, considered the fate of that child. How little sympathised with one who, among all the sufferers involved in the consequences of this crime, was the most deeply to be pitied.

At first, as we have seen, an alienation from her own little girl, and the substitution of interest for another, was such as has probably appeared to most, and especially to every happy mother, as utterly unnatural. Yet so it was—and such is too often the distortion of feeling produced by extraordinary circumstances, especially when linked with criminality, that I do not myself think it incredible. Hers was a character of impulse, as her whole life had shown, and though her impulses were generous and mostly good, yet no one, who has not learned to rule over

himself, can tell where circumstance and impulse, unguided, may lead him.

It is true the sweet influence of Imogene's character had made its way to her mother's heart, and Lady Emma had learned to love and delight in her daughter, in spite of all the painful thoughts with which she was associated. She had done this more freely, happily, and fully of late, under the delusion of that hope which she had allowed to become almost a certainty.

In the sudden destruction of these hopes—the ruin and despair that surrounded her—the light of truth at least broke through; and she now saw herself as she had never seen herself before, and called herself—almost justly—barbarous!

What! Had she never—never once—amid all her regrets for Edward, for herself, for Eugene, felt as she ought for Imogene? True, Imogene appeared to her as the favourite of fortune—profiting, though unconsciously, by another's wrong; but had she

never considered the instability of her position—never shuddered at the invisible but awful dangers that threatened her?

She hated herself. The Nemesis spoke at last. The agony of the present, the love, and cruel heart-rending pity which the mother felt for the fated victim of crimes and errors not her own, avenged good and innocent Imogene at last.

Emma was, if possible, more miserable than her daughter. Like some poor creature, a captive in its wiry cage, her soul seemed rushing from side to side, vainly endeavouring to discover an issue. But one presented itself; it was the only way to disentangle these perplexities, and secure what was just without injury to any one.

Without injury to any one! Ah! Emma, were you never young?

When people have passed the years of youth themselves, they are apt to forget the force of that passion which is the rose, the ornament, the perfume of that sweet

season. We have witnessed the sad prosaic ending of so many of those ardent attachments, that we come at last to under-rate their value, and, perhaps, to think, with Johnson, that if matches were arranged by the Lord Chancellor, it would be just as good a way as any other.

Lady Emma, disabused of life, despondent and disappointed herself, seemed to have lost the power of estimating what the strength of the young heart is ; and, as she sat there, her nerves gradually recovering from their excessive agitation, hope once more began to dawn.

The engagement between Imogene and Albert could not have been an affair of long standing—it was actually made but yesterday. The utter impossibility, in any event, of *that* engagement being persisted in, must be evident to every one. Time was all-powerful in matters of this nature. Time it would doubtless need ; but how many have—had not she herself—when crossed in their

earliest wishes, recovered their tranquillity, and been made comparatively happy in a second choice ?

What was to be done ?

The first, and most pressing necessity, was to gain time. Time for consideration, and, above all, for consultation with Mr. Glenroy. Numberless questions now presented themselves to her mind ; and first, as related to the secret itself, which, in the excitement of her spirits, she had revealed to Imogene without waiting for that sanction from Mr. Glenroy, without which, as it had been understood between them, it was on no account to be disclosed.

So far, except the misery it had occasioned, no irremediable harm had been done. She could rely upon Imogene's honour not to reveal what she had heard, without her mother's and her guardian's permission. Poor dear ! Emma felt too, that it was a secret no one in her circumstances could be impatient to divulge.

Time—time for thought—time for consultation—time to breathe—that was what they all must have.

She rejoiced that it would, at least, be some days before Eugene was to return—but then, it suddenly flashed upon her mind that her daughter had said she expected to see Albert Faulconer on the morrow.

That must not be.

It was impossible, in the present state of things, to allow of a meeting. What could it avail but to rivet the bonds—the bonds already too strong—which bound them to each other, and increase the anguish of parting?

At all events, the meeting on the morrow ought to be prevented.

She started up and rang her bell. It was, by this time, between nine and ten o'clock in the evening. That mattered not. She wrote a hasty note to Albert, forbidding him, in the most absolute terms, to appear at Haughton on the next day, or until he

heard from her again, and promising a somewhat fuller explanation in a short time. "For the present," the letter concluded by saying, "it was enough to state that, much as she esteemed, and might be said, to love him, it was impossible to allow him to entertain the slightest hopes of ever obtaining her consent to his wishes, and she besought him not to flatter himself that time would or could, make the slightest change in her sentiments."

She ordered a man and horse, late as it was, to set forward immediately for the Hazles, and ride all night, so that the note would be delivered, without fail, to Mr. Faulconer before he rose in the morning—and as if, by this effort, she had relieved herself of a most overwhelming load. She, too, borne down with fatigue, and the weariness following violent emotion, went to bed, and fell asleep.

I was awakened early the next morning by Albert coming half dressed into my room, drawing open my curtains, and thrusting a note into my hand—

“What am I to think of *that*?”

I read it twice over.

“Coolly enough dismissed,” I said, angrily.

I cannot tell you how I felt the mortification, the affront—the insolent affront offered—which I thought was offered to him.

“You have always told me, Lenham,” he went on, “that there was nothing in my position in life to render me unfit to ask the hand of Imogene Aubrey. Knowing what a large heiress she was, I have had my alternations of doubt and pride, as any other might; but you had encouraged me in my belief—that there was no reason—that, I mean, it would not be such a degradation of herself as I ought not to allow—for her to listen to me—unworthy as I am.”

“I have always said so, because I have always thought so—and this most silly and

arrogant letter of a nervous, irritable woman is not likely to alter my opinion. Imogene has a right to choose for herself. She has sense and discretion enough to be trusted with the disposal of her own heart. She has pledged it to a man that, in my opinion, deserves it as well, nay better, than any one I know—and if I were he, having got possession of it, I would keep it—or I would know a better reason why than I find here.”

And I tossed the letter contemptuously from me.

“But—but—” said Albert, sitting down by my bedside, and speaking in a voice that faltered a little—“This is not all—I had a note from *her* last night.”

He drew a little crushed note from his bosom, as he spoke.

“See, how unlike her usual pretty hand !”

It was, in truth, a blotted, almost illegible, scrawl. The hand had been shaking terribly that wrote it.

“It bids me come to her to-day. I was

just dressing ; for I have scarcely slept all night, so impatient was I to be off, when Frank put this second note into my hand. What *can* be the matter ? ”

“ Something unpleasant is the matter, certainly ; but possibly only a painful scene between Imogene and her mother. The mother, if we may judge from her note, appears pretty decided. The dear girl, by the tenor of, and agitation visible in, her’s, gives one reason to understand that there will be two voices to be heard in the business.”

“ But what am I to do ? Shall I go ? Do you think I may still venture to go ? ”

I hesitated a little.

In the case of so great an heiress as Imogene, I felt a certain pride and delicacy for my friend which I think now, was somewhat exaggerated.

He did not speak, but kept his eyes fixed upon me, impatient for an answer.

“ I don’t know what to say,” was the unsatisfactory conclusion, when it did come.

"You don't know what to say? Surely, Lenham, there cannot be a doubt about it—though I pretended to make one. Imogene bids me come, and I shall go."

I took up Lady Emma's letter again.

"The terms are most express—the mother absolutely forbids you to appear—'for all their sakes'—she says in this postscript, which we have both overlooked—'she conjures you' not to come to Haughton till you have heard from her again. She reiterates her entreaties—she begs—implores—for Imogene's sake—that you will wait till you hear from her. She repeats herself, as women do when they are most in earnest upon a subject. There is something more than common here. I do not much like Lady Emma, but she is kind-hearted and sincere. I did wrong to accuse her, in my first pettishness, of insolence. This is the cry of a suffering heart. Something more than common is the matter. No, you must not go."

“Not go!”

“Not till you have written again, at least. I think you cannot, in the face of such a note as this, force yourself into Haughton. I would write first—Send over a messenger immediately—After his return, you will have time left to ride over this evening. Write to Imogene—and entreat her to give you leave to come over, and have an explanation with her mother in person.”

Most unwillingly I brought him to acquiesce in this.

He wanted the wings of the wind to carry him over; the delay was intolerable—but at length he yielded to my persuasions. He went to the table, where writing materials were lying, and wrote to Imogene thus—

Albert to Imogene.

“My darling! My treasure! My heart’s own treasure! What am I to think? I was starting to fly to you, my precious one, when

a prohibition comes from your mother—an express prohibition—against my coming. What am I to think of this—coupled with your note of last night? She bids me give up all thoughts of you—and never to see you more. But you—you bid me come, my own!—and come I should, but that Lenham sees something I cannot see in your mother's note, and exhorts me to write for your permission before I present myself. Send it me, then, my love. I shall follow my messenger, and wait to meet him upon his return."

"Send Frank here."

"Frank," as he entered, "take a horse, and ride with this to Haughton Hall, as fast as you can lay legs to ground. You will have an answer to bring back. It shall be better for you if you make speed. Get them to lend you the best horse they have in the stable."

My room looked the way of the stable-

yard—you could partly see what was going on in it.

Albert placed himself at the window.

“ The lazy rascal—what a time he is !”

“ He was not dressed for riding.”

“ The fool !—Could not he have come down and got them to saddle his horse whilst he drew on his boots.”

He began to stamp with impatience.

“ The snailpaced scoundrel !—I had better go myself—I had much better. I *will* be the bearer of the letter myself.”

“ No, no !—besides, you are not dressed. He will be ready before you are, and, if needs must, you can follow him.”

“ Oh, there he comes—ready mounted ! Thank ye, my good fellow !”—throwing up the window and shouting—“ I shall wait for you at Harlington Cross !”

The horse pranced and reared, startled at the sudden throwing up of the window.

“ He rides like a jackass,” said Albert, shutting it down, and returning to my

bedside — “if a horse swerves but the tenth-part of an inch he can hardly keep his seat. I wonder what horse they have put him on. It's a brown, with white feet—an ugly beast enough! You have been here some days, have you made acquaintance with my Lord Ulick's stud?”

“I am not much of a stable-man—but I think I know the horse you mean—the groom rides it after his master—a hasty, ill-conditioned beast.”

“Frank's a fool on a horse. I hope the brute won't throw him.”

“Never fear—be easy!—Frank will manage him, I'll engage. He was used to all sorts of mounts whilst we were abroad.”

“How long will it take to get to Haughton? for I don't know the country.”

“Somewhere about three hours for a carriage, I think I understood.”

Albert appeared at breakfast, but at luncheon he was absent, and he did not return to dinner.

His mother became inquisitive.

She sent for me out, when dinner was over, and asked me if I knew what had become of him.

"Very strange!" she said; "he was to have gone to Haughton last evening. He did not go. When I inquired the reason, he merely said—it was put off, and turned away, as if not liking to be questioned. He is gone to Haughton now, of course; but I wonder I did not hear a word about it. However," she asked, with a meaning smile, "his remaining there cannot have much harm in it?"

"No:" I answered; "of course it must be all right."

"Did he tell you he was going to Haughton?"

"So I expect—I know he went that way."

"Thank you. He is a naughty boy, to go without giving me a word—I should have begged for a line, if only one, by an

express messenger, that I might have got it to-night—one feels anxious to hear what Lady Emma will say.”

Lady Faulconer, in fact, felt very much more anxious to hear what Lady Emma would say, than she chose to confess.

It was between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, as I was lighting my candle in the front hall, that I heard some one come in hastily from the stable-way into the back hall where the staircase was, and run up stairs in a strangely hurried way—I heard a door near the head of the stairs, which I knew to be Albert's, banged to and double locked.

I followed him, and stopped at his door.

There was from within the noise as of one thrown upon the bed and writhing with agony—I thought I heard low groans.

I ventured to try the lock.

“Who's that?” in a voice of rage, and starting up; “let the door alone, can't you?”

"It is I—Lenham."

"Oh! you—my good fellow! But go away—go away—leave me alone—can't you leave me alone," almost wildly, as I still hesitated, and moved the lock in my hand. "Leave me alone, for Heaven's love, if you would not have me fling myself out of the window."

"Albert, let me speak—everybody is gone to bed; let me in, there's a good fellow—let me in."

"If you would not have me curse you," he cried, with a tremendous oath, "you would take yourself away."

"Oh!" and I heard him dash himself on the bed again; "*I must* have it to myself—Oh! *I must* have it to myself—my love and my despair!"

"Dear Albert!"

"Go, go, I beseech, I pray, I beg—let me wrestle with it alone; I will come to you in the morning—perhaps in the night; but let me wrestle with it alone at first."

"But I dare not—you may do yourself an injury."

"Oh! no—no," and I heard him burst into tears, "that would make *her* unhappy. Imogene! my sweet, loving, innocent Imogene!"

I was more easy now; he wept—he was no longer desperate.

"I will go, then; come to me as soon as you can."

I threw myself upon the bed, but I could not sleep; I lay listening, hoping every moment to hear his footsteps. At last I got up, unable to bear my anxiety any longer, and crept to his door.

I heard him walking up and down his room; but, as he seemed composed, I did not venture to disturb him; I returned to my own, and threw myself again upon my bed.

Presently I heard a door open—some one

coming along the passage; he laid his hand upon my lock, and entered.

I was shocked to see how excessively ill he looked. The change which a few hours had produced was terrible. Once in his life before I had seen him thus shook and broken to pieces, like some wretch who had endured the torture of the rack. I was springing up to meet him, but he motioned me to remain as I was.

"Lie where you are," he said, "and I will sit down by you; I am quiet now, and I can tell you all.

"You know I started almost immediately after I left you this morning; that was foolish enough—it was impossible that Frank should arrive at Haughton to deliver his letter, receive an answer, and be back at Harlington Cross, before twelve or one o'clock—but I felt in that sort of irritable impatience which keeps one in such an insupportable state that one must be doing something. So I borrowed one of Lord Ulick's horses—and

rode off. When I got to Harlington Cross, my horse, to my surprise, seemed a good deal blown; but the stables are not managed here as if Ulick were my father instead of the sailor that he is—so I began to think that whilst I waited for Frank, I had better put him up and give him a feed, for I expected but one answer to my note—a summons to fly to her—and I wanted a winged horse for that.

“So I put him up, and, having seen him all right, in order to pass the time away, I went and walked about the lanes in the neighbourhood.

“I knew it was impossible that Frank should be back before twelve, hardly expected him before one; but twelve—one—two—three—came, and he appeared not.

“I waited with a patience I wonder at, as you will; but I had a sort of nervous fear of missing him in these cross-country roads if I left the place appointed, and I kept lingering on, quarter after quarter of an hour, expecting every quarter of an hour would

bring him—till it went four, and still he was not to be seen.

“I resolved, then, to mount and ride towards Haughton, and see what was become of him; for longer suspense was not to be borne. I rode on—but nothing was to be seen of him, till at length I saw the chain of the Armidale hills before me, and the well-known beloved woods of dear, dear, Haughton crowning them at a distance—oh! you know them well—how my heart has ever leaped when first they came in sight.

“I spurred my horse and cantered on, despairing of seeing anything of Frank, and feeling afraid he had blundered in his orders, lost his way, or something—and so I resolved to dare all, and see her, cost what it would.

“I was drawing near the well-loved place and reached that turn where one enters the very domain, and where the road parts off one way to her Armidale—which she has so loved and tended, the other to that

enchanted palace that holds all that is dearest, loveliest, and most precious of human beings. My heart began to beat fast—I put spurs to my horse and galloped on—when, just before I reached the outermost lodge gate, I saw a man and horse coming down the road. It was Frank.

“I drew up.

‘What *have* you been about? Have you a letter?’

‘Yes, Sir—here it is.’

“That’s the letter.”

And he ended this little narration, which he had gone through with a sort of forced calmness, by putting the letter into my hands.

Letter it was not, it was a short hurried scrawl, and blistered over with tears.

“My dear, dear, dear Albert.

“No, you must not come—even Mr. Elmsley says I had better not—that it is not right to see you yet—perhaps never again—Oh, it can’t be never! It shan’t be never! I

am in a dreadful, dreadful position, my Albert. I want your help and counsel—but they tell me I must not have it, it would be wrong. I don't know well what is right or wrong, my head turns round so ; but you must not come—no, no, you must not come—I don't know what I say—but love your poor Imogene—oh, that is wrong—If I were generous I should say forget her, and all about her ; but—but Heaven forgive me, for I cannot, cannot say it.”

He took the letter again from me in silence, saw my eyes were moist, and he took my hand and pressed it.

“And so you came home ?”

“No, I did not. I went on.”

“You did !”

“I rode into the stable-yard, gave them my horse to hold, and went to the house by that little garden glass door. You can't have forgotten it.

“The door was unlocked, and I went in.

“There was a strange silence in the

house. Along that passage you know of, which leads to the servant's hall, there came the distant noise of servants going about and talking; but even that seemed quieter than usual—servants in those great houses don't care much for the sorrow above stairs but there are some that reach even to them."

"Well," I said—impatient to hear more.

"I have nothing to tell. I did not get to see her. I went on till I came into the great hall; there was not a creature to be seen, and everything as quiet as if they had all been dead. I ventured up stairs. I looked down the corridor that leads to her room. Do you remember how we have stood and watched her, sweet little creature, as she used to trip away in her pretty white frock—like a fairy so bright, scarcely seeming to touch the ground with her little feet—and how I have stood there waiting for her, with all a boy's passion—a man's passion may be more violent, but it cannot be honest?"

"Well!"

"There is nothing to tell you—scarcely."

"Surely you did not come back as you went."

"No—not quite. As I stood there, I saw her door—*her* door open—and I felt frozen. You think I should rush forward. No, I trembled in every limb—I literally, at the instant, could not move. But it was not herself—oh, no, it was only old Nurse.

"I found the use of my limbs as soon as I knew who it was. I hurried to meet her. She started, clasped her hands, uttered a faint shriek, and said—'Heaven and earth! Mr. Faulconer, what brings you here?'—'I want to see your mistress—I am come to see your mistress—I must and I will see Imogene.' 'Oh, sir, sir!—you can't—you can't, indeed!—Do you know, something has happened—we can't tell what—but there's dreadful work. She is as patient as a dove, is my sweet bird, but the flesh is weak; and her mother, she's not—it does not become

me to speak—but Lady Emma's not altogether quite the sort of mother as that precious creature ought for to have.' 'But good heavens!' I cried, shaking with impatience, 'what's all this about? I must and will speak to Imogene.' 'Oh, hush—hush—Don't, dont, you'll disturb her—and I have at last got her to sleep, but she's been fearfully ill.' "

" Oh, Lenham!—can I bear to go on—is it possible! Yet I like it—It is a sort of last lingering pleasure to recollect all—every word, every look." But having said this, he went on with more agitation.

" She had had a terrible night, Nurse said—up and down, up and down, she heard her—but she forbade her to come to her—she said she *must* be alone. She looked fearfully pale and ill in the morning, but she kept up till twelve o'clock, as if expecting some one. Then a horse was heard coming up the avenue, and she started up and clasped her hands, as if in an extacy of joy, Nurse said.

But it was only Mr. Elmsley, who was returning, after having been absent a day or two. When she heard who it was, she sat down with a look of patient disappointment, Nurse said it would have broken a heart of stone to behold. She seemed trying to hold up, but her lips went quite white, and, for the first time, she asked for some sal volatile. She seemed better after taking it—and went and placed herself at a window in her room, from which you can just catch a glimpse of the approach, so as to see if any one is coming.”

Albert’s lips were almost blue with suppressed emotion, as he stopped in his relation, and said—

“You guess who she was expecting.”

“Yes—yes.”

“It was past two o’clock when my servant arrived with the note. When she got it, she seemed very much hurried, Nurse said, and more like being angry than she ever saw her before in her life. She went in haste

down to her mother's room. She found Mr. Elmsley with Lady Emma.

"She staid there a long time. Nurse knows nothing of what passed—but she came up again at last—snatched at, rather than took, her writing things—scrawled that last note to me—gave it to Nurse to take to my servant;—and when Nurse came up again, she found her in a dead faint, flat on the floor.

"I can't go on—I can't go on"—he cried, covering his face with both hands, and the tears streaming through his fingers. "That's her!—That's my Imogene!—torn from me in this mysterious way—That's what I've lost—Heaven help me!"

He wept some time, like a child, poor fellow! At last he proceeded—

"When she came to herself, she begged Nurse not to fetch her mother. 'Take care of me yourself, dear Nursey,' said the darling—as old Nurse told it. Nurse was sadly frightened—there was one fainting fit after another—but 'no cries, or hysterics, or

fuss,' says Nurse—'she's not one of that sort—just going quietly off, one fit after another—She couldn't help that, you know—She's one as never makes a fuss, but she can't help the dead swoons, you know, sir.' And so—and so—Nurse at last got her into her bed, and at last to sleep. She had just fallen asleep—and 'Oh, sir!—as you value her life, don't ask me to disturb her—indeed I can't, I won't disturb her, not even for *you*.' She said those very words, Lenham—she guesses how it is.

"And so I came away—I don't know how, nor what I said;—what between rage and despair—and love, oh, such love!—such as I did not know one *could* feel for anything. I left a message with nurse, begging her to let me see her, if it were only for five seconds; and that I would be there in the morning, and so I shall—and I rode home like a madman—but I am quieter now.

"I am wonderfully composed now."

CHAPTER X.

What equal torment to the griefe of minde,
And pyning anguish hid in gentle heart,
That inly feeds itself with thoughts unkinde,
And nourisheth her own consuming smart?

SPENSER.

THERE are passages in some lives, when the soul, exposed to a fearful temptation, is summoned at once to cast down all that is dearest in the world, and, in the full extent of its meaning, "take up the cross," at the call of obedience and duty.

The soul struggles, as in deep waters, and a horror of great darkness overshadows her—standing, as it were, upon the edge of that fearful gulph which severs the two eternal regions—trembling as she looks down into

those depths of sin into which this one disobedience to the great command may hurl her—yet shuddering, reluctant, in the weakness of her mortality, before the immensity of the sacrifice she is called upon to make, when she flings away all that this world contains most dear.

In this strait, the soul of the young, but heroic girl was agonising—Her agony increased by that sort of hesitating uncertainty as to what was the right—or, rather—I should say—(for I think from the first, whatever others may have felt, she had no hesitation herself as to what must be right)—tempted by the thousand pleading voices of contradictory feelings and principles, which it seemed impossible to reconcile—calling upon, and persuading her to swerve from the direct line—the narrow path of rectitude—in obedience to the tender, faithful affection that yearned about her heart.

Her love and constancy to Albert—his ex-

cellence, his sincere attachment—his broken hopes and heart, were pleaded !—How would he have adorned the station which he would have occupied by her side ! What a faithful regent he would have proved over her little empire !—Then her people !—how greatly everything connected with their welfare and happiness must depend upon the husband she should choose ! Could she have chosen better ?—Alas !—Where so well ?—And then the excessive happiness !—The virtuous, rational yet rapturous happiness ! Though it *was* one's own happiness—was it to be counted as nothing ? was such an inestimable treasure as perfect happiness to be flung away ?

Thus the voices called and clamoured.

There was but one answer.

“ I, firmly in my conscience believe, that this property is not rightfully mine. The law gives it me, it is true, and my mother—with her usual resolute adherence to the exact truth, whatever her wishes may be—and I see how ardently she desires that

which she believes to be just—my mother has not concealed this from me, that if I choose to hold this property I may. No power on earth can wrest it from me. But she tells me that I hold it by a double wrong—Ah, my father! I asked her not to enlighten me as to that, but in offering that prayer my heart made a secret vow, that the wrong—though unexplained—I would make good!”

Perhaps my readers may think it an easy matter to abdicate—to throw up a rich inheritance and become a beggar for conscience sake! “but, let not him that putteth on his armour rejoice like him who taketh it off.”

Yet you will all anticipate what happened, and that right, in a heart like Imogene’s, triumphed. She would yield the inheritance to Edward Aubrey’s rightful heir. This was the first great sacrifice she felt called upon to make.

When she had established herself firmly in this resolution, she became more easy. If it had not been for the thoughts of Albert

she would have taken a certain pleasure in giving place to Eugene, whom, in spite of all his faults, she loved as a brother; but to come penniless to Albert—to whom she had held out the prospect of such a rich endowment—and more especially as it regarded his family—could she bear to do it? His friends, she well knew, though expensive in their habits, were not rich. She had been upon too intimate terms with them not to be well aware of that circumstance. She doubted whether it would be right—whether it would even be possible—for the marriage now to take place. He, just entering into life, to be hampered with a marriage to one without fortune or connexions.

“Nothing but this poor heart to give, now,” as she said sadly to herself.

Of course she must release him from his engagement; that was, as she told herself, what she had to do in that meeting which she had so much desired. But there was a sweet loving, flattering voice which whispered

within her mind, that thus it would not all end—that they should not part thus for ever—and in this sweet hope she waited impatiently, yet not altogether unhappily, till Albert should appear.

We have seen that it was not until the afternoon that she received his note, and learned that her mother had forbidden him to come; and then she dimly recollected, as one does a half-remembered dream, something that had passed on the yesterday, about Eugene.

That idea—supposing even the notion of that idea was not a mere delusion—had been at once and indignantly scouted, and driven from her mind as something alike impious and impossible. Indeed, so completely had she rejected it, and substituted at once the alternative of preserving her freedom, and relinquishing her fortune, that, thinking her mother acquiesced, she had dismissed that odious subject from her thoughts.

But now it rushed to her recollection again.

What could her mother intend by forbidding Albert the house?

She felt angry. It was a new feeling for her. She scarcely knew what it was to be angry—so gentle and kind was her nature. Now she rose hastily, as Nurse has described her doing, and hurried down to Lady Emma's dressing-room. She found Mr. Elmsley sitting there.

His usually pale face was paler than ever, and extreme mental pain was written on his brow.

"Mr. Elmsley!"—then, going up to Lady Emma, who was looking still more weak and suffering than usual—but, for once, Imogene felt neither interest nor pity—"Mother, have you forbidden Albert Faulconer the house to day?"

"Yes, Imogene—Child, don't be angry—Child, don't look angry—I never saw you look so before. Pity me, Imogene—it was right—indeed it was right; ask Mr. Elmsley."

“Have they told you all?” turning to Mr. Elmsley.

“Yes,” he said, sadly—“Lady Emma has confided the whole to me. It is safe with me as with yourself.”

“I don’t doubt that—I was not thinking of that—What I ask is, why I must not see Albert?—What he will do—what *we* will do?—it is for ourselves to settle in the best way we can. You need not be afraid, mother, that I shall hold him to his engagement; but I *must* see him again, if it is only to tell him that, at the cost of all I possess in the world, I shall adhere to my duty. It will comfort him to know I love him, and am true to him—as it would me if our places were changed—and he shall have that comfort.”

“But,” said Mr. Elmsley, rising and taking her by the hand, and leading her to a chair which stood at the foot of her mother’s sofa—“Dear Miss Aubrey” . . . and then he hesitated, as if seeking for words.

“Imogene”—said her mother rising, and coming and sitting by her, and she took her hand—“I think you could not have understood all I told you last night.”

I will not repeat the scene which followed when the tenour of her father's will was once more distinctly explained to Imogene,—and at the same time, Lady Emma, who thought it now an imperative duty to tell all, related the history of the wrong that had been done to Edward, in the matter of the disinheritance, and she was made to understand the utter impossibility of making restitution, except in one way—a way from which she revolted with an abhorrence not to be overcome.

“It *is*—it *is*—a fearful strait,” Mr. Elmsley kindly said; “yet the alternative of persisting in this gigantic injustice must be to a soul like yours, Imogene, impossible. But, understand, all your mother at present asks is time—time for you to reflect—time to examine the question yourself; and, my dear, surely, for the present, you will agree

with her, that you ought not to see Mr. Faulconer!"

She was silent.

She had struggled with a force of resistance quite unnatural in her—a vehemence, approaching to violence, against the hateful idea; but the violence began to abate, as her blood seemed to chill, and her heart felt dying within her—like that of some poor hunted creature, enveloped in an inextricable snare—for whom it only remains to submit, the victim to an invincible force. She yielded—all that was womanly and right within her yielded—to Mr. Elmsley's representations.

The high colour which had mounted into her cheeks subsided, the flashing eyes became dim. All spirit had left her now. Pale, drooping, and subdued, she rose from her seat, and saying,—

"I may at least write to him myself—to tell him this—that will be but kind—I will go and do it." She crept, or

rather tottered away, and went to her own room.

Some few days have now passed, during which, Imogene, who was by this time seriously ill, had been obliged to keep her chamber. On a request she had made to her mother, which Lady Emma immediately granted; this was that, under some pretence or other, Eugene should be kept from Haughton, until she should receive an answer to the appeal she should herself make to Mr. Glenroy.

This appeal was her last hope.

The hope was a vague, but it was a strong one. The difficulties with which she was surrounded were, to all appearance, insurmountable; yet she had such faith in Mr. Glenroy, that she believed him capable of overcoming almost everything. She had the most entire reliance upon his affection, and upon his principles; she felt sure that he would not suffer her to be sacrificed to

any consideration upon earth, except the demands of strict justice. And he had so often shown his ability in reconciling contradictions, and overcoming difficulties, that she felt certain that, if it were in the power of any human being to help her, he would.

She waited till she had recovered a little strength before writing this letter. Perhaps she was not sorry to find an excuse for delay. Though hope predominated, yet she often shuddered and started—a prey to vague apprehensions; for her nerves were already so dreadfully shattered, that she would have been the victim of fear where no fear was. How much more did she suffer from it now!

At last she wrote.

Her letter was simple, and exactly truthful. Truthful, as a matter of course, it would be in the relation of facts; but it was more than this,—no feeling was withheld; all was related with the utmost fidelity. Her own secret convictions—her sincere struggles not to deceive herself or tamper with her con-

science—her regrets as regarded the property; and last, and most important, the state of her affections, and the revolt of nature against the unnatural alliance which was proposed, and which her whole soul rejected as impossible.

Nothing was left undescribed, and all was related with a strength of feeling—a simplicity and single-hearted desire to do right, which made the letter the most affecting composition I have ever read in my life. I would copy it out for you, but that it was but a repetition of what, in attempting to describe her state of mind, I have already related.

The sinkings of the spirit—the flutterings of the heart—with which Mr. Glenroy's answer was awaited, they, alone, can adequately realise who have known what it is to have all they hold dearest in life dependant upon one single cast.

Already sadly weakened by the first shock, and the dreadful revulsion of feeling which

had followed it—these few days of expectation exhausted her lamentably. In vain she struggled for patience, courage, and faith. Suspense is an awful thing to endure. The best remedies of the soul, which aid us in supporting the fixed and inevitable, seem powerless whilst all is trembling in the balance. She cast her humble, trusting eye upwards, but her heart could not find a moment's rest.

At length a letter, directed by the well-known handwriting, arrived.

She was sitting in her mother's dressing-room when the post-bag came in, but no sooner had she caught a glance at the address, than she started up, seized the letter, and fled—not to her own room—in that place she might have been found, and been called away—but to bury herself in the very depths of the woods.

Arrived there, she felt secure from interruption. She threw herself panting upon a bench—but kept holding the letter before

her unopened—turning it—looking at it—trembling to unseal it—nevertheless, with an internal presentiment that in it she should find a rescue. When had the affection of Mr. Glenroy ever failed her? When had his advice been anything but a source of comfort, and a relief from every difficulty?—a never-failing solace.

At last she took courage, unfolded the paper, and read as follows—

Mr. Glenroy to Imogene.

“MY VERY DEAR CHILD,

“That which I have long in silence apprehended has then, at last come to pass!—and the curse which follows crime and folly, but in which you had no share, has fallen upon your innocent head.

“This law of retribution we find written in the ancient sentence from on high—‘The children to suffer for the sins of their fathers.’ From this sentence I have vainly struggled to shelter you, even to the very

verge, perhaps beyond it, of what was strictly right. In my presumption, endeavouring to wrestle with the eternal mandate. But what was I? to strive at the impossible—to attempt to erase the past—the past, graven, as with a pen of iron, upon the immutable rock of ages.

“ My child, I am now lying stretched upon a bed of pain and sickness, from which, at my age, it is probable I shall not again rise; and things—believe me, my good girl—assume a very different aspect at hours such as these, from what they do in the full energy of life. I now begin to perceive that, in my passionate desire to save the little child from the consequences of that which I too hastily decided upon as a mere romance, exaggerated by imagination and wayward feeling, I refused conscientiously to examine into its truth, and I would not suffer myself calmly to weigh the evidence of that which ran so counter to my own wishes.

“ I would not even patiently listen to

the details of what I chose to denominate an absurd, incredible invention—nor would I admit the possible claims of him I chose to consider as raised to importance, merely through the partiality of one and the strange, morbid imaginations of another.

“The law was appealed to—and the law decided as I had anticipated that it would; and this served to strengthen me in my obstinate perseverance in the course I had adopted.

“I use the word obstinate deliberately; there *was* obstinacy in the part I took. There was an evil will, as well as a blinded perception. I did not see, because I would not see.”

“In this course I have persisted.

“You know, my child, that I have endeavoured to rear you in the manner I thought best calculated to make you able worthily to discharge the heavy duties and responsibilities which possessions such as yours entail. So far I stand acquitted to myself.

For several years this was done, in the honest, unshaken conviction, that you were, in fact, the real heiress of these estates, and that no being existed who had a right to dispute your claim. But now, my dear girl, I must come to confession, and tell you all that has passed within me. I will open my heart to you, as you have done yours to me.

“As time rolled on, my convictions began to be shaken.

“The absolute assurance that I was right, which I had managed to maintain so long, began slowly — almost insensibly, to give way.

“I began to doubt—and more than to doubt.”

“Yet I was a man made of obstinate materials—one little accustomed to change, far less to retract — for I was too proud, too self-willed to confess an error.

“Long I resisted the suspicions which gradually strengthened within me, and even

when they had amounted almost to conviction, to no one on earth were they acknowledged.

“My dear girl, the evidence that convinced me was written, in characters not to be mistaken, upon Eugene’s face and yours.

“These characters are often scarcely discernible in childhood, but as years advance the indelible marks of family descent become more and more apparent. In the present instance they were not to be denied. The great Author of Nature seemed to have impressed them with an emphasis which it was impossible to resist.

“It has pleased Him, who is justice and truth in their essence, that such characters should, in this case, have been so distinctly marked, that my conscience has been for some time unable to resist the appeal. Your own likeness to her who claimed your father for her son, and Eugene’s to the unhappy Edward Aubrey, are alike great—I may say extraordinary. Others might not have been

convinced by a circumstance of this nature. Men are variously affected by the same evidence. I who refused to listen to any other, felt myself forced to yield to this.

“The impression made upon me, I must also acknowledge, has led me to a more careful review of the question, than in my pride and obstinacy I would give it before. The result has been, that Eugene Aubrey suffers under a twofold wrong.

“You will ask me, my child—not without a secret sentiment of reproach—why, when this conviction was arrived at, was it not immediately made known. Ala ! to what avail ?

“I had, by my own contrivance and advice, wound round you an inextricable web, from which there was but one means of escape. I had reason to believe that these means—the only ones we could look to for the ultimate satisfaction of justice—were in a fair way of being obtained. Such being my hope and belief, it was my opinion—and, in

spite of all, still remains my opinion—that it was most important, both to your and Eugene's happiness, that this secret should never be revealed to either of you.

“To possess this secret, could in no way profit any one—your marriage would afford your poor mother and me the opportunity for seeing that full justice was done—and, shall I confess, my good girl, I might be a little biassed, by my extreme desire that you should not altogether relinquish that authority which you had administered so greatly to the happiness and advantage of so many, and which increasing years would enable you to make a progressively increasing benefit to all.

“I own, before these convictions which I have confessed to you were admitted to myself, I felt secretly inclined to oppose your mother, in what I knew to be the earnest desire of her heart, namely, the formation of an attachment between you and Eugene; I felt inclined, may be, as much from perverse-

ness of temper, as from anything else, to look with greater favour upon Albert Falconer. Of late, however, my wishes—my hopes—my prayers, have all centred in one object—that of a union between you and Eugene, as the only means remaining of making restitution possible, and reconciling the contradictions and difficulties which surround us.

“It was but too evident to me that by this, and by this alone, wrong might be atoned for, and justice done, and this without the necessity of unveiling the lamentable histories, which not only entailed such grievous doubts and perplexities, but, even worse than that, would have indelibly stained your father’s fair name.

“Now, my child, all is not yet lost.

“This most painful history of wrongs and crimes still remains a secret between us four—you, your mother, Elmsley, and myself—and so it may for ever remain, if my dear Imogene has the courage to do that, which

it is my conscientious conviction that she ought to do—a conviction which I hope and believe I shall bring her to share.

“In the first place, then, rest assured that, rightly or wrongly—as far as I was concerned in advising the terms and disposition of the will, I now think wrongly—the truth is, you cannot rid yourself of this fortune.

“You cannot lay it down. Except as an endowment in marriage, you cannot bestow it. Even were you to die, it is a doubt with me whether you could bequeath it; but you are young, and you are not likely to die—and Heaven forbid you should.

“Now, my dear—though I never was given much to enter into what people call the romance of life—I think, in your simple description of the state of your feelings, I can understand what it must cost you to resign that which you look upon as so essential to your happiness, and to turn your thoughts another way.

"Yet, my Imogene, rely upon it such things may be done.

"Disappointments of this nature are occurring every day—for one youthful attachment that comes to a happy conclusion, hundreds are frustrated.

"More especially is this the case in the higher grades of social rank. As we rise in the scale, the necessity for such sacrifices becomes more frequent. What are princes but the regular victims of such arrangements? We expect them unhesitatingly to acquiesce, because, upon them the wellbeing of millions may perhaps depend. We demand an unhesitating sacrifice of inclination upon their part to considerations so vast and important—and would despise, as a contemptible weakness, the attempt, to plead what are called the interests of the heart, against considerations so vast and overwhelming.

"And are not the interests of JUSTICE equally binding upon *you*?

"Justice is not a matter of degree.

“Justice is an eternal, infinite, absolute obligation, from which there is no power upon earth to release us.

“This obligation, in my opinion, lies upon you, now.

“For as I expect speedily to appear before the Fountain of all justice, so may I find mercy tempering it to me, as I believe that you wrongfully hold the possessions which you have inherited—and, that the safe way—the rightful way—the one way—the only way—to repair the evil committed is that which we point out.

“If, child, you doubt my conclusions, you you have a right to the benefit of your doubts. If you resolve to hold your possessions and maintain the freedom of your choice, I do not believe any law in this land can touch you. But consider well what, in that case, you would do.

“You would carry that which is not rightfully yours into another family—to give birth, perhaps, to heirs who from your hands shall

receive and carry the inheritance down—and with it—who knows?—maybe, a curse. The blasting curse which the history of kingdoms, as of families, leads us to believe actually does attend, like some inseparable appendage, upon unrighteous possession.

“I think I have exhausted all I had to say.

“My dear child, I cannot, and will not believe, but that your own reflections will add force to what I have urged. I know you have a brave and righteous heart—a heart such as the heroines of the old time possessed; I call upon it now to struggle against and to overcome this youthful inclination; I call upon it to resist the delusions of passion—to break through the trammels which, as I am told, enthrall those who have entered into—shall I venture to style it?—the Fool’s Paradise of love.

“I exhort you to look the matter resolutely and boldly in the face—to hold fast by duty, wisdom, truth, and justice—to stand

to the permanent and the eternal, and, like dew-drops from the lion's mane, shake off the fleeting dreams of imagination and passion.

"I shall write to your mother and Mr. Elmsley by next post.

"It is my strenuous advice to you, Imogene; nay, I command, as much as your guardian has now a right to command, that, as regards that mystery which hangs about yourself, the most profound secrecy should still be observed, and that Eugene may never be made acquainted with it. It will be sufficient to make him aware of his own position, as the son of your father's elder brother, and the opinion of us all, that it was owing to a misconception of circumstances that the disinheritance took place; also, that such was your own father's latest conviction, and that he proved it by the endeavour he made to rectify the injustice, through a will which he did not live to execute.

"Under these circumstances, it will be for

your mother to give him to understand what her and my wishes are, and then leave him to proceed in the way he likes best.

“Farewell, my dear, dear Imogene.

“If I have written in any way to pain you, forgive your old friend. Remember he lies where all must sooner or later, come, and where we dare not dissemble with ourselves, or others. Believe me, my child, when you, in your turn, come so to lie, it will not make your pillow less peaceful that in the spring time of youth you offered up a favourite inclination to the claims of right and duty. And so receive a poor sinner’s prayers and blessings.

“ANDREW GLENROY.”

CHAPTER XI.

Had we never felt so kindly,
Had we never loved so blindly,
Never met, or never parted—
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

BURNS.

Do you know what it is to have the heart
die within you?

It is a common expression—everybody
talks of their heart dying within them, but
do you know what it really is?

Few—very, very few—I trust and believe,
have ever experienced it.

It is when, in the full springtide of youthful
existence—before we have been hardened by
disappointment, or have received one lesson
in the apprenticeship of sorrow—life shuts in

at once with all its prospects, and hope is totally extinguished.

Then that human heart of flesh—whose nourishment is happiness, and the wine of whose existence is hope—dies.

Sometimes it bursts at once, and there is an end of it. Sometimes it receives the mortal wound, and slowly, though surely, by degrees, expires.

It was as if her heart went at once quite cold.

It was not racked and torn with violent emotions; she did not faint and fall down—far less shriek and tear her hair—far less than all, was she able to shed a tear.

She sat quite still,—chilled to the very core, as if all the warmth within was gone.

She saw it all.

There was neither help nor hope—nor even sympathy. It was plain, by the whole tenor of Mr. Glenroy's letter, that he had not the slightest conception of the true distress of the case. The transference of affection—

to her that invincible impossibility—seemed to him only one of those difficulties in human life which a little resolution might overcome.

A pain, like other pains, to be struggled with and endured, in the cause of right. Not a crime against all that was best and most sacred in human nature—a sin as monstrous as impossible !

Her last anchor had now given way. Drifting on the wild ocean of despair, she felt that utter solitude of the soul which, to one still so young, so affectionate, so docile and good, so anxious to seek council, and so earnest to consider and follow it—was the extremity of desolation and ruin.

And so she remained passive for some time, in all the dreariness and darkness of her anguish.

She tried to look up—but even the very light above seemed darkened. She sank under that melancholy sense of utter abandonment, which is the final proof that the combat within is becoming too strong, and

that the powers of life are about to give way.

That utter darkness never lasts long with the truly pious, loving, and humble—but there are moments when this feeling of abandonment—the last fierce trial of affliction—is added to the rest. We should none of us taste the full bitterness of the cup if it were not so.

She could not at present reflect. She felt that some great resolution upon her part was called for—but it must be the work of time. Suddenly and hastily she would not take it. All that she could at present arrive at, was, that whatsoever she felt convinced was right that she would endeavour to do.

By-and-by she got up to return to the house. She was surprised at her own feebleness when she rose. It was as if she had gone through a sharp paroxysm of illness. Her knees knocked together—she could hardly stand. She tottered along, however, got up stairs, and then patiently laid herself

down upon her sofa to suffer. She did not feel equal to appearing at dinner, and sent down an excuse. They sent her up a little delicate food, but it went away untouched. A glass of water was all she could swallow.

The moment dinner was over, Lady Emma flew up stairs.

"My dearest child, what is the matter?"

She held out her hand to her mother, smiled sadly and faintly, but did not speak.

"Anything new? What is it my love? You look worse than ever. What can have happened?"

"Only," speaking with difficulty, "a letter from Mr. Glenroy."

"It is come, then? Ah! my dear girl! and what does he say?"

"He says—as you do"—

And she closed her eyes and lay still. She was struggling to keep down a scream of agony.

"May I see the letter?"

She felt as if she were furnishing arms

against herself; yet as if it would not be loyal and honest to withhold anything.

She gave it to her mother.

Lady Emma read it with deep attention—sorrowful attention I might say—and it was some slight consolation to Imogene, upon that dreadful day, to find that her mother could feel pain at receiving support to her own wishes and opinions. When she had finished, she stooped down and kissed her daughter's pale and chilling cheek.

"You *are* an angel from Heaven, Imogene," she said reverently.

Imogene opened her eyes.

"Mother! But I have not yet decided what to do."

"No, my love, but—but you see your way."

"I don't know—I think—yes," she went on, as if inspired by a sudden thought, "I think I *do* see my way, but it lies through deep waters."

She remained in her own room for the next three days, only leaving it now and then to take a little air in the shrubberies, leaning upon nurse's arm.

At the end of this time, she sent to speak to Mr. Elmsley.

She then told him that she had arrived at one conclusion, of the necessity of performing one duty there could be no doubt—that of dissolving her engagement with Albert, and she had already written to him for the purpose. With respect to Eugene—she said, she must have time. She left it to her mother and Mr. Elmsley to proceed as Mr. Glenroy advised, or in any other way that they might think better. One thing she felt satisfied ought to be done—that his true position, as related to the Aubrey family—and the nature of his rights, as regarded the erroneous impressions under which Mr. Aubrey made his last will—ought to be immediately communicated. She thought this might be done, and her father's memory be sacredly respected—and

she made it a condition of any future concession on her part that this should scrupulously be attended to.

As for Eugene himself—all she could at present promise, was, that she would try to do him justice.

“But, perhaps—it is possible”—while a faint brightness of hope, like the gleam of a wintry sun, passed over her face—“Perhaps Eugene himself may not desire justice under this form.”

There was a hope—a lurking hope. She remembered the beautiful Laura Faulconer. Scarcely dared she indulge that hope—but it fluttered now and then at the bottom of her heart.

Eugene was to come home the next day.

She had settled with her mother that she should not even attempt to appear. It would be an effort which, in the present state of her health, she felt it impossible to make, even if a thousand innocent and delicate feelings had not absolutely forbade it.

Lady Emma's feelings were so complicated, that it is as difficult to describe as it was for her to unravel them. Most tender sympathy for her daughter's sufferings was brightened by a secret relief and joy that it was impossible for her to help experiencing.

To a stander by—even if that spectator be a mother—the sympathy with the sufferings of a disappointment in love bears not the slightest proportion to the intensity of the reality. Even those, who in their own young experience have gone through such pangs, forget their bitterness—the recollection pales with years. We remember that we suffered greatly, but we know that we struggled through. There is a dreamy unreality in the subject, except to those who are actually under its influence, against which we ought all—especially those of us who have outlived the years of passion—to be on our guard.

For, be the cause imaginative and unreal, or what you will, it belongs to the mysteries

of the infinite. It touches upon all that is most sacred and intense of human existence. And, whatever the source may be, its power for suffering, or for bliss, is the strongest of mortal things.

To Lady Emma, as to Mr. Glenroy, the substantial part of the circumstances which involved them, pressed with what I could almost call an undue weight. That, perhaps, is not the proper expression ; who can attach undue weight to the perseverance in a great act of injustice ? But this was certainly true. In comparison with the intensity of that, which pressed so strongly upon both their minds, sufficient importance was not attached to the state of Imogene's affections. They both felt that it was a severe trial of her courage, and a great sacrifice to demand ; but Mr. Glenroy certainly would have preferred exacting even this, to the seeing her stripped of the possessions he so fondly loved to contemplate as hers. Lady Emma, on the other hand, would, I believe,

have been satisfied, at any sacrifice, to see her child happy in her own way—but this she knew to be impossible consistently with what she considered as the demands of common honesty.

The evening of the day that Eugene returned home was fixed between Lady Emma and Mr. Elmsley as that upon which the disclosure should be made to him.

Upon Mr. Elmsley's feelings as regarded these events, it does not appear necessary to enlarge. Enough, that he felt them with all the sensibility of a most kind nature ; yet, at the same time, he had only one wish and one view—that time might render it possible for justice to be done by the only way in which it could be effected.

Lady Emma had asked him to be present at the conversation with Eugene, and he had consented. He had, indeed, one very serious cause for anxiety—his doubts of the character of Eugene. There had been a wilfulness—a disposition to jealousy—a certain want of

openness and generosity of temper, which had often occasioned serious uneasiness to the conscientious tutor, even before he had looked upon the young man in the light of one to be so closely connected with his darling Imogene; but now this, which had been formerly an uneasiness, became a most restless and pressing distress.

How would Eugene bear himself under these circumstances?

The disclosure took place in Lady Emma's dressing-room; that room which Eugene had loved from a boy, as the only place in, or about Haughton, where he had ever felt perfectly happy, and his feelings unembittered by jealousy; for here he knew himself to be truly and sincerely beloved, and here, and here alone, he occupied the first place.

"Eugene, my dear," began Lady Emma, with that soft and gentle voice which he had ever loved to hear, for when addressed to himself there was a certain tender intonation, in which he felt that even Imo-

gene did not share—"Eugene, my dear, I have asked you to come up to my dressing-room because we shall be uninterrupted, for I have a communication of deep interest to make—one which, though we have long felt it best as regarded the happiness of all parties to keep from you, we think now must be no longer delayed. In the *we*, dearest Eugene, I include Mr. Glenroy; who, though you may at times have looked upon him as cold and harsh in his conduct to you, feels, I can truly affirm, as sincerely anxious to do you justice as my poor self. Of Mr. Elmsley I need not speak—you know by experience, how truly he has laboured for your best interests. He is nearly as anxious to see you righted in this world as that you should find mercy in the next.—I need not say more!"

"Mamma Emma," said Eugene, caressingly; "you are very serious, this afternoon:"—and he went up and kissed her—then, his countenance suddenly assuming an

expression of deep seriousness—"I have long been expecting something of this sort." And he placed himself upon a chair, behind the arm of the sofa upon which she was accustomed to rest, and leaning his elbow upon it, covered his face with his hand, and said :—"Go on, dear mammy, I am ready to listen."

She began her narration. I need not repeat the oft-told tale. He listened, without uttering a syllable. There were slight convulsive starts—faint exclamations—but he kept his face hidden with his hand.

She ended, with some solemnity,—

"I bless you, then, in your lost father's name, as Edward Aubrey's son."

He lifted up his head—that fine face of his was almost divinely beautiful, as with a certain dignity he said,—

"I have expected this long."

"You have?"

"Yes—from a child. It is difficult to hide truth—something will escape ; from my

earliest childhood, I have had a secret persuasion that I was more nearly connected with Haughton than was acknowledged—and that I was, in some way or other, *wronged*. That secret persuasion has not, I fear, improved either my heart or temper.”

“All has not yet been told,” Mr. Elmsley now put in; “how the wrong is to be repaired?—that is the question which we all feel pressing upon us.”

“Repaired!—Wrong is more easily done than repaired!” he said, with a certain haughty carelessness; “It is not probable that any reparation the friends of Imogene might think it right to offer, the son of my father would think it right to accept; slight reparation for such injuries are, to some tempers, worse than none at all—but I thank the kindness of the intention.”

“You are mistaken, Aubrey.”

He started from his chair at hearing the name thus bestowed upon him, and a flash of pride and pleasure kindled his cheek.

"You are mistaken, Aubrey. It is intended to offer you no slight compensation. It is felt *for* you as you feel for yourself. Nothing short of the *whole* will be tendered."

He turned pale.

"You do not mean—you cannot mean—disinherit Imogene? Oh, no—it is impossible! impossible!"

Lady Emma's cheeks were now crimsoning, as she faltered out, "Imogene cannot give it you—by the conditions of her father's will, she cannot—except—except—as . . ."

"Oh!" said he, almost relieved for the moment, yet with a touch of his usual bitter sarcasm in his voice—"Oh, yes—all right—she cannot; and so there's an end of it—There's not a word more to be said, except to express my gratitude for all your good intentions . . . if fortunately or *unfortunately* it had not been out of your power to carry them into effect."

"Aubrey, you are doing Lady Emma an immense injustice," said Mr. Elmsley, with

severity; then, turning to Lady Emma,
 “Shall I?—for you cannot proceed.”

She gave him an affirmative sign.

“Understand then, young man, that, by the conditions of the late William Aubrey’s will, it is rendered impossible for Imogene Aubrey legally to do that, which you know her well enough to be certain when once convinced of the justice of your claim, she would be ready to do—namely, surrender these possessions to the rightful heir. In one way only can this restitution be made . . . The hand of the present possessor must accompany the estates.”

Again he started up, clasped his hands, and his face seemed all on fire.

Then, sinking back again—

“No—no—I cannot understand you rightly. Her hand!—did you say?—Imogene herself? Oh, no—I am not worthy.”

“You will do better justice to the human heart in future, young man”—Mr. Elmsley went on with gravity—“You will believe;

whatever the knowledge of your own character may teach you—that there are hearts to whom the rules of justice and honour are inflexible laws. There has not been the slightest approach to any desire to deal unfairly by you in these most painful circumstances. If the secret has been withheld, it was with the hope and the intention that such an attachment might spring up between you and Imogene as to render this termination of all difficulties a source of unmixed felicity to you both . . . from the existence of feelings which, if you had either of you understood your relative positions, it seemed scarcely probable, according to the usual constitution of human nature, could arise. Whether these long-cherished hopes have been, or will be, crowned with success is . . . your own secret.”

“You offer to give me Imogene!”—turning to Lady Emma, his face all in a glow—“I *did* understand you rightly, then?—you offer to give me Imogene?”

"Yes, Eugene—And may Heaven bless the gift."

"You are so generous!—so just, so good!—Yet what have I ever known of you but what was generous, just, and good? Oh, I have been most ungrateful! And Glenroy too!—Does he? Can he? . . . He always seemed to hate me."

"No, no—Perhaps he did not quite understand you; you and he are so different. He sincerely wishes this, as the only possible way of redressing wrong."

"We *were*, indeed, different, and he did me but justice by his ill-opinion," Eugene said, evidently much affected—"but this shall be the opening of a new life to me, mother—I will try to deserve her."

"You love her then, I feared . . ."

"Love her!"—And who on earth that ever saw her but must love her!—But I tried to learn not to care for her. I believed she cared not for me. I little thought . . . But will she?—Can she?"

"It must be your part to make her will and can," said Mr. Elmsley.

"Oh! if I could!—but I am not worthy!" then, again starting up with energy—"May Heaven leave me to perish if I do not strive to become worthy! This is a new life—a new life indeed it shall prove . . ."

"Imogene! *my* Imogene! May I see her?"

"Not just at present, Eugene; she has been very ill. These revelations have come too suddenly upon her. She requires time to look upon you in that new light in which she has allowed you to stand . . . But you must make your own way with her."

"Ah! . . ."

We must return to Albert.

Lady Faulconer reaped, in both her children, the fruits of the deceitful and crooked ways she had adopted to reach, so far as regarded them, her several objects.

The health of her son once more gave way. He was obliged to resign for the present, at least, the honourable post he had been invited to occupy. He went to the Madeiras instead.

Laura—the victim of Eugene's endeavours to wean himself, in resentment of her indifference, from Imogene—pined and faded. She was sincerely attached to him, and her mother had given every encouragement to the attachment—thinking by this means the more effectually to counteract Lady Emma's plans.

It was not in human nature that Eugene should hesitate for an instant when the alternative was offered to him.

He admired and honoured Imogene, and the *prestige* of her position had, with a character such as his, added a something—not, perhaps, to be called love—but a something equally strong to his other feelings. He seems like but too many young men in such circumstances, to have felt not the least scruple of honour, or the slightest remorse in

respect to what had passed between himself and Laura. He chose to forget all, and found it easy enough so to do, in the absorption of his present serious interests. What was a trifling flirtation like this in comparison?

With Laura it was far different. And Lady Faulconer, with mortification, learned—what her own experience had not happened to teach her—she, never having possessed a thing of that sort to bestow—how much easier it is to encourage a girl to give her heart away than to get it back again for her when rejected.

Imogene remained a passive and patient sufferer under the force of a necessity which she felt it impossible to resist.

The idea of injuring Eugene—by persevering in retaining what she believed to be justly his—she was incapable of. She could not persist in that which, in her conscience, she believed to be a wrong. Those whom she alone trusted, had decided for her,

that in one way alone was it possible for reparation to be made.

She submitted.

Patiently she bowed to the inevitable—that mysterious inevitable—in which she believed herself to read the will of a Power she was bound unresistingly to obey.

But the heart within continued like a stone ;—and it is from the heart the spring of life has its source. It was as if frozen within her,—incapable of anything but passive endurance.

The only time that she was aroused to emotion, was when she by chance learned that Albert Faulconer was ill, obliged to give up his situation, and go to Madeira. She trembled from head to foot—and shed a few tears—and then she stole out, and spent the whole of that evening wandering alone.

There was a sweetness in this sorrow. Something told her that they should not be parted long.

From that time she suffered mentally less,

but her physical strength declined more rapidly. She observed this with a secret joy—but she endeavoured to conceal her increasing weakness—and no one seemed fully aware of it.

It is too often thus with those we live with every day, and whom we cannot bear to believe so ill as they really are.

She had felt that the sacrifice which she thought it right to make was nothing, if it was not complete. She had, therefore, scrupulously concealed from Eugene what had passed between herself and Albert Faulcener; but further than this in concealment she would not go. She made no disguise of the sentiments with which she allowed him to aspire to her hand. Sisterly affection she had always felt; more than such regard and friendship she did not believe it would ever be in her power to offer; but that would accompany what she had to bestow, and they would try to do their duty by each other.

This was a chill to feeling upon his side;

and yet there was an indescribable charm about Imogene, which, in spite of her coldness, drew him irresistibly towards her. The tenderness arising from the looking upon her as his own—that sweet human feeling became hourly more soft in its character—he began to love her worthily and well. His own disposition rapidly improved under these influences.

It was, perhaps, upon the whole fortunate that one of so arrogant and proud a temper should be humbled without being bitterly mortified. There was something about her even in her sadness and reserve that could not mortify. Much of it he attributed to circumstances, and to her state of health.

He was sanguine, and he was honest, so far. He had resolved to endeavour to deserve her better, and his hopes told him that in time he should obtain his reward, and her love would be his at last.

The happiest time they spent together

was when engaged in her great object of improving her numerous dependants. She had, at least, the satisfaction of finding that Eugene, now he considered them as virtually his own, took an ample share in these interests. He wanted her softness, her generous fulness of love; but he was sensible, and seemed to take pleasure in feeling, and acknowledging the responsibilities of his new position.

Jealousy was gone. The pride of possession, perhaps it was, that succeeded—but better feelings were mingled with it. He began, for its own sake, to take pleasure in the good he diffused.

She seemed to find satisfaction in the progress of this change, but she continued to fade.

Her mother ventured once or twice to hint at the coming to some conclusion; an object that Eugene, to do him justice, had too much delicacy even remotely to press, for which delicacy he had his reward in

her silent gratitude, and the nearest approach to tenderness of feeling that he had ever been able to excite.

She answered her mother always in the same way—

“Have patience, mother ; I know what I have to do—but the right time is not come yet.”

She wished Eugene to go abroad for a few months, “to pass the time away,” she said ; “it would be a great amusement and advantage to him.”

Anything she desired he was ready to acquiesce in—more especially anything that might contribute to the perfecting of his education, for he now felt his own inferiority, and most sincerely desired to make himself more equal to her.

When Mr. Elmsley, with much satisfaction, remarked this to Imogene, she smiled gently and expressively.

She was not insensible to the pleasure of believing it—

“He will be a good master to them all, poor things!” she said.

So Eugene went for a few months abroad, and Imogene remained quietly at Haughton.

He set out in November—at the latter end of the following March it was that, to the surprise but extreme gratification of Lady Emma, she asked her to write and beg of Eugene to return home.

CHAPTER XII.

Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart untravell'd fondly turns to thee.

GOLDSMITH.

IN one part of the extensive gardens of Haughton Hall there was a spot which had always been an especial favourite with the successive children of the house.

It was where a small artificial lake—or, perhaps, more properly old-fashioned canal—was shut in, and enclosed by trees of every variety of form and beauty, which, hanging around it, shaded the turf and flowers in which it was set, as it were, like a precious diamond in a frame-work of jewels.

The waters of the little lake were indeed transparent as rock crystal, and in the centre a small ever-living fountain played, throwing up its plashing waters—and gurgling and breaking over some piled stones, by which it escaped, and, as a little purling brook winded away through the neighbouring woods.

Fishes, so tame as to answer to the voice, glanced and gleamed in the clear waters, and two snow-white terns, with their crimson bills and feet, here floated and played. Wild flowers—violets, primroses, foxgloves, forget-me-nots, honeysuckles, sweet briars, and innumerable others—blossomed on all sides.

On one bank there stood a small old-fashioned bower, covered with creepers, which had been of late suffered to run into a tangled maze. Imogene had thought the long festooning streamers so beautiful, that she had not suffered them to be pruned. It was at the expense of torn

garments that you got in there; but she loved to have it left so.

To finish the little sketch, I must mention the abundance of lilacs, laburnums, syringas, and rhododendrons, which, growing in profusion about and around, rendered this spot at the season of the year at which we are arrived supremely beautiful.

It was the month of May, and the loveliest of days in that enchanting month of months this was—a day, when nature in all her affluence of tender beauty just bursting into life, speaks to the human heart such a tale of love and joy.

But the tale was a terrible one to her.

There are passages in human existence, when the sweetest smile of nature is like a baneful poison—stifling the heart which it cannot warm.

She had found it more than usually difficult to conceal her melancholy at this lovely season of the year.

This particular day of which I speak

was one of the very loveliest. Everything is so bright. The gleaming sun shedding that heavenly glow over all things!—the many-coloured tints of the young leaves!—the rich confusion of the happy looking flowers!—the humming insects—the floating butterflies, blue or scarlet, like winged roses or violets!—the rapture of song among the wild birds! I use fanciful expressions, I want you to feel that heavenly day with me.

A wayfaring man, with the air of a gentleman, though very plainly clad, and bearing the aspect of one worn by severe toils, is slowly ascending the hill upon which Haughton stands.

He does not come up the usual approach; but has taken a retired bye-path, known and frequented by the family alone. This path leads through the deepest recesses of the woods and shrubberies to the house and gardens. It was here that Mrs. Birchell had found William Aubrey walking alone, years ago—

when she was, as you perhaps recollect, so much affected by his appearance.

The wayfarer advances slowly, it would seem almost painfully, along—from time to time he stops, and gazes around him, or before him. Now it is some aged tree that he approaches and wistfully examines the bark, as one does to search for characters long ago inscribed there—obliterated but now; sometimes he pauses where the glades open, and the lovely landscape, and the blue distance is seen between parting trees—Now it is when the house, at some distance, is partially discovered through the branches.

The traveller stops and sighs.

Few things are more melancholy than the changes upon which life's pilgrim looks back—few things more melancholy than the return to well-known scenes, when years have swept by, carrying away in their course so much that rendered them dear, parents and children, brethren and friends.

. . . The tide of life sweeps on.
The loved, the great, the beautiful !
Where are they gone ?
The very paths in which they trod,
I shall behold no more ;
Each lingering vestige of their steps,
Relentless time sweeps o'er.

And what remains ? A nature robbed of its life-spring—a soulless, voiceless relic of joys gone by for ever.

Such were the thoughts which saddened the brow of that travel-wearied man, now, after his long exile, returning to the hearth of his fathers, that his soul might bless it before he died.

The home of his early youth, which he had so passionately loved—with that attachment to one particular spot, which may, where it exists, be indeed called a passion, and, when in its full force, is, perhaps, one of the strongest of our nature.

He had found it impossible to obtain rest for his spirit till he should have revisited the place once more.

He must see Haughton—the Haughton of which he had been disinherited, before he could be at peace. Yet he had not murmured at his father's sentence, though its severity had, in the first vehement agony of his, as yet, unchastened feelings, driven him almost mad, and to an attempt at self-destruction. But his almost miraculous preservation—the offer, as it seemed to him, of a new life, had sobered him, and given a higher aspect to his views as respected this world and its relations.

He was changed—converted—and “the flesh came again to him, as the flesh of a little child”—Henceforward he became a new man.

The world assumed a totally different aspect.

No longer a theatre for mere personal enjoyment, but a stage for the serious and persevering discharge of duty. No longer the fleeting, painted vision of the hour, but—both as regards ourselves and others—a most grave and weighty place of preparation for a more real and permanent state of existence.

Edward Aubrey possessed a strong character. What he clearly apprehended, was not feebly embraced. Once thoroughly persuaded, and once resolved, his persuasions remained, and the resolutions built upon them faltered not.

Guided by an honest desire to acquit his conscience both to God and man, he entered upon that "path of the just." He found it according to the promise—"Like the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day."

His ardent aspirations to be of service to his fellow-creatures only strengthened as he went on. His readiness to sacrifice everything personal to this great object, increased with every effort made.

His exertions in Egypt had been often disappointed, and frustrated by the insurmountable nature of the obstacles with which he had to contend. Some good he had effected—for no sincere endeavours of this nature are, I believe, absolutely fruitless—but his soul was

bleeding for the darkened Africa beyond—Its sin and its sufferings—of which he had, where he now was, the opportunity of learning the extent and the horrors, haunted him.

Something, he felt sure, might be done, if the light of truth—of the blessed Gospel—were but honestly and faithfully carried there. He was a shipwrecked man—more fitted to undertake the dangerous and arduous service?

He confided his little boy, as we have seen, to his friends, purposing, in the course of a couple of years, to rejoin them, claim his son, and discover himself or not, as circumstances might render advisable. But this he had not been permitted to do. Various obstructions to his return, which he had found invincible, had forced him to remain buried for years in those barbarous regions. Every one had long ago supposed him to be dead—but he had lived through all, and, at length, had made his way back again to Egypt.

Here he had no difficulty in proving his

identity, for he, as Omar Bey, had innumerable friends, and was universally respected and known. He gathered together what remained of his property, and returned to England, with enough to satisfy the moderate wants of a man like his present self—and to start his son in the world, if he should find him still living.

Immediately upon his landing, he made his way to Haughton. He hoped to find Mr. and Mrs. Birchell still occupying the endowment which he had managed to procure for them, and his son making one of their family; but there was an interest almost still more tender that drew him involuntarily to the well-loved place.

He should find it occupied by his brother—the husband of his early love. It would be painful—yet it would be healing—to return to it unknown, and to wander over the dearly-loved scenes of his childhood. Whether he should disclose himself or not, he left to the inspiration of the moment.

He had put up the evening before at a small country inn, at no very great distance from Haughton, and had made inquiries of the landlord as to the state of things there.

He first asked after his brother.

"Eh, sir!" was the answer; "you must have been a mortal long time away from this part of the country, if you do not know that William Aubrey—he as succeeded the old man on the death of his brother—has been dead himself these fourteen years and more."

After a short pause, in which the stranger endeavoured to master and conceal the effect of this sudden shock—

"Then who lives at Haughton now?—Is it shut up?" he asked.

"Oh, no such thing, sir; Lady Emma Aubrey—William's widow, you know—and the daughter, Miss Aubrey, live there—and it is kept up in all its state, and has been, ever since the young man's death."

And then he went on to describe, in the

language of almost enthusiastic admiration, all that had been done for Armidale and the rest of the property ; and spoke of Imogene as the really good, and generous—benevolent without ostentation, and religious without pretence—are usually spoken of by those who live near them. He ended his little relation by saying—

“ But I’m afraid that pretty young creature is in a bad state of health. Some way or other this world does not seem good enough for such angels—they mostly die young.”

“ What is the matter ? ”

“ I don’t know—It’s no business of mine There has been talk—Folks will talk—They say there’s been strange mysteries someway about the place. Haughton Hall has, somehow or other, not carried a blessing with it. People tell as how after all it’s a love disappointment. . . . Those young natures, they will feel it, sir—it can’t be helped. I’d a child of my own once—I was hard, but I thought as how I’d good reason, sir”—and

the good landlord brushed his hands across his eyes.

“*How* is this?”

“Why, sir, there’s a young man as come here with Mr. and Mrs. Birchell, late vicar of the living of Haughton, and there has been a mystery about him. Nobody knows exactly what to make of him—a very handsome young fellow he is—and now it seems he is to be married to Miss Aubrey. But people *will* talk, and they do say how it’s her mother’s doing, who was thought never to be as partial to her as mothers are used to an only child; and they whisper that it goes rather against the grain with that dear, sweet, young girl—which seems odd, for he’s a very handsome young man—but love is love, and nature is nature—and some way all’s not right, I fear. But—”

Here the landlord was called away upon business. Edward lingered a little while; but, as he did not return, he went to the bar, paid his reckoning, and walked on to Haugh-

ton, where we find him wandering in the lonely woods chewing the cud of his sweet and bitter fancies.

He followed a well-known path, which led to the little nook I have described, with its small pond of gelid water, its bubbling fountain, its flowers and shrubs, and high overhanging trees. It was very sweet to him to find it so little changed. The shrubs had grown taller, and the branches of the trees had extended, and covered the little solitude with a deeper shadow ; but, even to the snowy-plumaged, scarlet-billed tern, floating about upon the water, the scene was much as he had loved it in years long gone by.

The bower, too, was all tangled and overgrown, instead of being kept trim and close as it used to be ; but he did not dislike it so.

He sat down upon a bench near the entrance of this bower, and gazed upon the water, and the trees, and the lovely clear blue sky, and mused upon past days, and thought of the brother he had loved so dearly,

and who had betrayed him, and yet whom he had loved on still—But now he was dead, and on this earth he should behold his face no more.

He had longed to see William, to have all explained, and, if his brother had yielded to temptation, to pity him and be reconciled. He also longed to see Emma once again, even as his brother's wife; for his own marriage, and all that he had since gone through, had sobered his feelings, and what once had been passion was now only a kindly friendship. Then he thought of the landlord's tale—of his own beautiful boy—the legacy of that lovely being he had for a short time called his own; and, above all, he thought with interest of that child of William and Emma, whom the landlord had painted with so much honest enthusiasm, and of the half-explained story of her decline.

He too well knew the romances which the gossips of a neighbourhood are apt to spin out, grounded upon events taking place in a

leading family, to attach much importance to the landlord's story ; but he sat to considering how he should, if possible, get acquainted with the truth of the matter, before making himself known.

He had thus remained for pretty nearly an hour, engaged in such thoughts, when he heard voices approaching. They seemed to proceed from the walk which led to the house, and there was a sound as of wheels.

Unwilling to be seen till he had finally resolved upon what plan to pursue, he retreated into the bower close by, from whence, though effectually hidden himself by the obscurity of the place, and the tangled branches which hung over the entrance, he could not help seeing, and hearing also, as he afterwards found, what passed by the side of the water.

He had no intention of this sort when he had withdrawn within the bower to escape notice ; and he was now a prisoner, for, unless he discovered himself at once, there was no means of escape.

The noise of wheels proceeded, not from a garden chair, but from a sort of couch, that was drawn by a footman in livery. By it walked an elderly woman, who seemed an upper servant also. Upon the couch, her head resting upon some raised pillows, so that she was only in a half-recumbent posture, lay a young, beautiful, but pale and most delicate-looking girl; with an expression of face that at once rivetted his interest.

A divine sweetness and patience was expressed in it; but there was something more than that—a sort of celestial brightness—a sublimity—such as beams from the countenances of the glorious angels, “who excel in strength.”

It was indeed a lovely apparition.

A revelation, it seemed, of better existences than those of this poor world.

A voice most soft and sweet, yet clear and harmonious, worthy of the divine countenance, was heard to speak:—

“Thank you—and now, if you please, put

down the writing-things there," as a second footman approached, carrying a little table, that fitted to the sofa; "have you my writing-book, and the packet of papers?—There, if you please. Nurse, dear, I would rather be quite alone; but don't look unhappy, dear Nursy—I will let you come again in half-an-hour—just to see that I am safe."

And she smiled gently and affectionately, and then she coughed—and Nurse turned away her head.

The footmen were already gone.

"I wish, Miss Aubrey, you would have done with that nasty writing," began Nurse, lingering, as if unwilling to leave her; "it's worse for your chest than anything."

"I don't do much in the writing way, Nursy, dear; don't be unreasonable, that's a good woman!—A little I *must* do"—cough again—"I have a good deal to finish—before the—the end of May."

"Ah! the end of May will soon be here

—but I fear me you don't mean to be better then."

A faint colour flew to the pale cheek.

"I mean to be better, if I can."

"Do you, really?—Are you sure—sure—you don't want—you don't wish to be worse?—I am but a poor servant, Miss Aubrey"—Imogene cast her eyes upon her with such a loving look!—"but I'm your nurse all one—and I've taken you from the first, and loved you as my own—I don't like to vex you, for you have had' more than enough to vex you—I can't help seeing that . . . It was upon my heart to speak to you hundreds of times, but I've been so afraid to worry you—but now it's borne in upon my mind, there is a meaning about that end of May—*Those who do not wish to get better, seldom or never get better.*"

"Do you think so?—I am sure I do not know."

"There's something within me tells me, you do not want to get better."

A deep, serious expression in the lovely eyes, which were fixed upon Nurse in silence.

But presently she said, "Nurse, dear, you were right before—I would rather, if you please, not talk of these things."

"Ah, dear me!—And perhaps it may be the *not* talking of 'em which makes 'em press so heavy."

Again the sad and serious eyes were lifted up to Nurse's face, with a sort of doubtful acquiescence.

"Most young ladies of your age, dear, have sisters, or been to school and have schoolfellows—friends next to sisters—and such get together, and talk these things over—and comfort and help each other's young hearts, in a way old cum-fogies as I am can't do. But it's my belief—even if *I* might speak a word now and then—just a trying to soften the sore a little—it would be better than the making a grave of your poor heart, and burying all there

in silence. Now, if I might only say—
Albert !”

She started, half raised herself, coloured crimson—but only said :—

“ Oh ! Nurse !—How dare you ? ”

“ I’d dare more than that, and I could do you any good,” said Nurse, steadily.

Then she went on, for Imogene had relapsed into silence.

“ Eugene’s a handsome boy, and a clever boy ; and many a lady in this land there is—and one I think I know of—would be proud and blest to call him her own—but he’s not *your* boy, and never was—and one may as well try to heave up the Tower of London, as to cross nature in these things.”

“ Nurse ! you must not—You must not talk in this way ! ”

“ But I must ! It’s out at last. You’re killing yourself, Imogene, I see it—by inches—nay, by yards ; for death comes on with rapid strides. You strive to please your mamma—but you can’t do it.”

"I tell you you can-*not* do it—and you must give in at last. Nature's too strong, and you must give in, or it will kill you."

The colour had faded away as fast almost as it had risen; at the sound of the too-dearly loved name, it now returned faintly again, as with a gentle patient smile, she said,—

"Life was once very dear to me—Life is a sweet warm thing—Death!—oh! death is awful at times—not always," and she lifted up her eyes to the heavens above her. "No—no—not always—always. And, awful or not, when we are summoned we must go—willingly or unwillingly, we must go. Oh! may I be ready when I am called."

"But you are not called. Killing oneself is not being called—and you *are* killing yourself—I tell you, you can-*not* do it!

"I must do it nurse—you talk of what you do not understand. We must do our duty, and this I know to be *my* duty. And so may He who gave me this task help me—as I

will strive to do that which I believe is right."

"But only listen."

"No, Nurse. I have listened already too long! You mean it kindly, Nursey, dear," she went on caressingly, seeing Nurse look pained and hurt—"I know how kindly you mean it; but it is mistaken kindness—You cannot alter facts—you do not know all that I know. What I do—believe and trust me, it is my duty to do. I have settled to perform it in the way least painful to myself. If I am selfish in this, I hope to be forgiven—for I have not strength for more. Don't, dear Nursey, speak to me upon this subject again—You only weaken me, when you mean the best, and I want all the strength I can get. And now, Nursey dear, leave me a little, I wish to be by myself."

The tears were now running down the good woman's cheeks. Imogene looked agitated.

"Don't, don't, dear Nursey—For my sake,

don't. Go away, dear Nursey, now—I must be a little while quite alone.”

“ I am afeard to leave you.”

“ Don't be afraid, dear good Nursey,” affectionately, “ I am not quite so bad as that comes to—I am not going to faint away—I shall lie quietly at my work, for I have a good deal to do, but I will not tire myself”—as nurse shook her head—“ and in half-an-hour by your watch I give you leave just to come and peep, to see how I am going on—but if all's right, go away again, without interrupting me by speaking.”

Nurse shook up the pillows of the couch—adjusted the eider-down quilt that covered the young girl's feet, arranged the light grey silk, sort of open pelisse that she wore over her white muslin dress, and quitted her.

She lay quite still for some time after being left alone, half raised, and resting upon her arm—her eyes, with an air of loving peacefulness, wandering slowly over the clear blue sky, the shrubberies, in all their

wealth of lilacs and laburnums, and the fountain and its crystal basin of waters. Then her face gradually clouded over, her eyes moistened, she sighed, and wistfully murmured in a low voice.

“ We might have been so happy.”

Then, as if determined to resist the indulgence of regretful thoughts, she rose from her couch and walked slowly round the little basin, examining the flowers and shrubs, and breaking off large bunches of the lilac—white and purple grape clusters, with streamers of yellow laburnums, she returned to her sofa.

Her steps were faltering and uncertain. She was evidently extremely weak; and when she replaced herself upon the couch, she drew her breath with difficulty.

When she was a little recovered, she opened the portfolio beside her, and first she drew forth a tiny manuscript book—It seemed to be a book of prayers, for she read in it, and appeared absorbed in an act of devo-

tion. As she proceeded, her sweet and troubled countenance gradually assumed an air of divine serenity—and a something like a pale lambent glory of hope and peace was diffused over it. She pressed the little book to her lips as she concluded, closed it, and placed it under the cushion beneath her head. Then she took up the bunches of flowers which lay by her side—buried her face among them, as if drinking in their fragrance with rapture—replaced them—once more opened her portfolio, took out a number of plans and calculations, and, with her pencil in her hand, was soon occupied reading, comparing, and making notes.

Nurse stole to the appointed spot—but seeing her thus occupied, retired without giving the least sign of her presence, and the young girl quietly continued her work.

Not a sound disturbed the stillness of the place ; except that of the little birds hopping and creeping about, as if no human being were present ; the bees humming among the

flowers; a throstle singing his musical heart out, at a little distance; and, now and then, a cuckoo calling in the woods.

Never was a lovelier scene.

And so he thought, as with a saddening brow he gazed upon it, and, slight as the indications had been, thought that he but too well understood the story.

He perceived that the plan with which Imogene was busied, was one for building a church.

She had been thus lying for about an hour, when footsteps were again heard approaching, and a gentleman appeared. He came up to the side of the couch.

"Mr. Elmsley," she said, "Oh, I wanted you to come."

"I have been up to Armidale—or I should have been with you sooner."

"I have been looking it over—and I think it will do—I have noticed a few little things I should like to have altered—When will they be able to begin?"

“Not until the end of June, I fear.”

“Ah!—But if anything should happen—I mean, you know, life is uncertain to us all—if anything should—though it were not begun—he would begin it—would he not—For my sake—don’t you think he would?”

The pale countenance of Mr. Elmsley was contracted with an expression of excessive pain, as he said,—

“You will live not only to see it begun—but completed—I trust in Heaven’s mercy that you will—and many, many years, please God, to see the fruits of this good work.”

“When all is settled and over you will be better,” after a little pause he continued—
“This restlessness and agitation keeps you in such a feeble state—It is a duty to be performed—and when it is performed, and not till then, will you taste the peace that waits upon honourable and conscientious self-sacrifice.”

She made no reply to this—but kept her

eyes fixed upon a drawing of the elevation of a church. She pointed to one of the windows—"I don't know that I quite like this," she said.

After that she continued to converse upon that and other subjects connected with Armidale. At last she said, she felt inclined to walk a little way among the trees, and asked Mr. Elmsley to give her his arm.

In assisting her from her couch he threw down the cushion—the little manuscript book fell with it to the ground, unperceived.

They walked about a quarter of an hour, then she returned to her couch, and, complaining that she was tired, asked Mr. Elmsley to summon the footman to draw her back to the house—which was done.

The couch slowly disappeared among the trees—The little book was left where it had fallen.

He never thought whether it was a violation of good faith or not—he stepped from

his concealment, seized the book, and returned within the bower to look into it.

He found it what he had expected—a manual of her own meditations and prayers—and the whole story of her heart was revealed!

I am not going to give you any extracts.

Such things are too solemn, too real—touch too nearly upon the *only real*—to be admissible here.

From what you already know of that heart you will imagine what its silent givings forth must have been.

He read with moistened eyes.

The last melancholy prayer was one that had evidently been very recently composed. It was a supplication for forgiveness if she did wrong in delaying the consummation of her sacrifice until the hour of approaching death was near. It was evident, by the whole tenor of the prayer, and one or two short ejaculations and meditations that accompanied it, that she believed that hour was

now drawing near, and that she had thought it right to summon Eugene home, that their hands might be united before it was too late.

A fervent entreaty for forgiveness in that, even now, she could not banish that other image entirely from her heart—and a supplication that they might meet in peace in heaven—ended the writing; the book was not finished—there were a few blank pages left.

He now felt that he understood everything.

Except that he could not quite enter into the indispensable nature, as the young creature seemed to consider it, of the duty to be performed. He saw that he himself was looked upon as one who had been greatly wronged, and his son through him—but to be disinherited was, after all, not such an unheard-of event in human life as to demand for its compensation a sacrifice enormous as this.

But, without questioning further as to this matter, upon one thing he at once decided—the sacrifice should not be made.

Haughton was dear—No one but himself knew how dear. It was within his grasp—but he turned at once away from the temptation.

He was a man of prompt resolution—What it was right to do, was, without parley, to be done.

My tale must be brought to a close.

Edward Aubrey has returned to the house of his fathers, and “Peace and Righteousness have kissed each other.”

He was wise, experienced, and good.

He did not object in this tangled intricacy of interests, powers, to endeavour at a compromise between different wishes and claims.

There was no romantic exaggeration about his character.

Rather than sacrifice that sweet young creature—perish Haughton and everything on earth he held dear! But he did not refuse to seek for some arrangement, some middle term, by which the rights of all might be adjusted.

We never know until an able, energetic, determined spirit takes a matter up, what is or is not, possible in human affairs.

He set himself at once to examine the stringency of those dispositions in her father's will by which Imogene appeared to be bound.

In law papers—it is a sort of proverb I have heard—"He who binds can loose." It has been found so in the case of still more considerable interests than even those in question here.

The method was tried, and it was found possible to release Imogene.

From the first hour that the hope was suggested, she began to rally ; as that hope brightened, to mend ; when the hope was realised, she was saved.

Edward refused to listen to the tale of "Alice Craven's Romance," as he persisted in calling it. He chose to continue to regard William as his own twin brother, and Imogene as his rightful heiress ; and he insisted upon an equal division of the property being

made between the two children, as the only terms upon which he would accept the least portion of it.

So Imogene and Eugene held Armidale, which it was not easy to divide between them in equal partnership. Edward had Haughton, and Imogene left it without regret. She had suffered too much to have any difficulty in giving it up. She loved Drystoke a thousand times better.

Imogene married Albert, and Eugene married Laura.

And I am afraid this is, after all, a very immoral story, for Lady Faulconer's schemes met with a success which she very little deserved.

THE END.

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